

GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH



THOR.

Longmans' Class-Books of English Literature

GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

BY

ALICE ZIMMERN

(GIRTON COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE)

AUTHOR OF "GREEK HISTORY FOR YOUNG READERS," ETC., ETC.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA

1907

INTRODUCTION

THE stories in this book tell of the gods whom our English ancestors worshipped. When the Angles and Saxons invaded Britain and gradually spread their rule over the greater part of this island, they brought with them their own customs and religion. Like the Romans, who had conquered Britain before them, they believed in many gods; but they were very unlike those whom the Greeks and Romans worshipped. The Teuton conquerors were a hardy race of men, who loved war better than anything else in the world, and thought that their gods were like themselves, big and burly, with huge appetites, delighting in feasts of fat meat and tankards of foaming ale. When they died they hoped to go to the heaven where these gods dwelt, and there live the life they loved best on earth, spending their days in fighting and feasting.

Most of the peoples in the North of Europe had the same belief. It was held in the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, and throughout Germany. Exiles from Norway carried it to Iceland, the Orkneys and Hebrides, and the coasts of Ireland. The old legends of these northern nations passed from one country to another and were handed on from generation

to generation, till at last they were written down in the Icelandic language. The collection that has come down to us is called the Edda. Part of it was written down about 1000 A.D., and the rest about two hundred years later. All the stories in this book are to be found there, except the tale of Beowulf, which was written in Anglo-Saxon some time during the eighth century A.D.

CONTENTS

PART I.

STORIES OF THE GODS.

	PAGE
THE GODS OF ASGARTH	1
HOW THOR GOT HIS HAMMER	9
HOW THE WOLF WAS BOUND	11
HOW THOR WENT AMONG THE GIANTS	13
HOW THOR WENT FISHING	21
HOW THOR AND HRUNGNER FOUGHT IN SINGLE COMBAT	26
HOW THOR FETCHED MIOLNER HOME	29
HOW THOR WENT TO GEIRRODSGARH	33
HOW THE APPLES WERE STOLEN	36
THE DEATH OF BALDER	41
THE BINDING OF LOKE	48
THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS	50
THE NEW LIGHT OF DAY	54

PART II.

STORIES OF THE HEROES.

I. THE STORY OF SIGMUND.

THE WRONG	56
THE VENGEANCE	64
THE DEATH OF SIGMUND	70

II. THE STORY OF SIGURD.		PAGE
THE REARING OF SIGURD		75
ANDWARR'S HOARD		79
HOW SIGURD SLEW THE DRAGON		84
HOW SIGURD WOKE BRYNHILD		89
HOW SIGURD DWELT AMONG THE NIBLUNGS		92
THE DEATH OF SIGURD		97
THE END OF THE NIBLUNGS		105
III. THE STORY OF HELGE		107
IV. THE STORY OF BEOWULF.		
HOW BEOWULF FOUGHT WITH GREDEL		116
THE SECOND FIGHT		124
BEOWULF'S LAST FIGHT		129
NOTES		135

GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

PART I.

STORIES OF THE GODS.

THE GODS OF ASGARTH.

HAVE you ever wondered how the days of the week came by their names? Of course Sunday and Monday are the days of the Sun and Moon, and Saturday is named after the Roman god Saturn; but what about Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday? These also bear the names of gods, those whom our heathen ancestors worshipped; and though nearly all traces of their religion have vanished, we are not likely to forget these names which are so constantly in our mouths. The Saxons and Danes and other Northern folk who came and settled in this island of ours believed in a great number of gods, who lived in a bright and glorious place called Asgarth. That means the Home of the Asers, the name that was given to the twelve chief gods who lived here. Each of them had a beautiful palace of his own. The finest of them all belonged to Odin, or Wodan, as our Saxon forefathers called him. After him the fourth day of the week is called Wednesday, which means Wodan's day. He was the father of many of the other gods, as well as the



ODIN.

creator of mankind; and men often spoke of him as All-father. He had other names also, but the one we know the best is Odin, the Icelandic form of his name.

Odin's palace was called Gladsheim, which means the Home of the Glad one. In it stood the thrones of the twelve chief gods, on which they sat when they assembled to discuss the affairs of gods or men. The most wonderful part of the palace was Valhalla, the hall of the warriors. Its walls were hung with golden shields, and at night the gleam of sword-blades gave light instead of lamps. In the centre of the hall grew a great ash called Learad. It was the highest tree in the world, yet the part that stood in Valhalla was only the summit of a far larger tree, whose roots went down to the very ends of the world. Asgarth was at the top, midway was Midgarth, the Middle Land, where mankind dwelt, and at the base were the kingdoms of cloud and darkness and the realms of death.

Valhalla was so large that it had five hundred and forty doors, and there was room in it for the spirits of all the dead men who had fallen in battle since the beginning of the world. No true Norseman ever wished to die in bed. The "straw-death," as they called it, was unworthy of a brave man; but all who fell fighting in battle hoped to join the other warriors in Valhalla, and spend their time after death in feasting and combat. For as war and fighting had been their chief joy in life, it was still their delight after death. Every morning they were roused by the crowing of a cock, and armed themselves and went out into the great courtyard. There they formed into divisions and companies, and engaged one another in fierce combat; but the wounds they dealt healed at once, and those who fell in battle sprang up again to fresh life. When they were tired of fighting they went into the hall to feast. Every day Odin's cook boiled a huge boar in an

4 *GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH*

immense cauldron, and though the number that feasted was so large and grew larger every day, yet there was always enough meat to satisfy them all. In the night the boar's flesh grew again, and there was plenty as before.

These dead warriors had excellent appetites, and they were thirsty folk too, and Odin would have thought it an insult to set water before such worthy guests. In the great hall was a goat called Heidrun, who nibbled at the branches of the ash. From her udders flowed a stream of ale, which every day filled a jar so large that all the warriors could drink from it and yet not empty it. The drink was poured out by the Valkyries, tall and beautiful maidens, who helped the heroes in battle, and carried their spirits after death to Valhalla. Thus the dead warriors passed their time in feasting and fighting; but one day they would go to war again in bitter earnest. The more warriors came to his hall, the greater was Odin's joy, for he knew that one day he would need a great army to fight against his own foes. There was a prophecy that in the time to come the giants would make war on the gods, and scale the heights of Asgarth. To fight these terrible enemies a large army would be needed, and therefore Odin gladly welcomed all the brave men who came to join his hosts.

Odin knew all about this prophecy, for few things either past or to come were hidden from him. His favourite seat was on the top of a high hill, from which he could overlook a great part of the world. There he had placed a throne, from which he could observe the doings of gods and mortals. What he could not see himself was told him by his two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, whom he sent all over the world for news. They would fly back to Odin and perch on his shoulders, and whisper in his ear the secrets of the world.

Odin's wife Frigg had a palace of her own, where she was waited on by goddesses who did her bidding and carried her jewel casket. She was as wise as Odin, for all things past and present were known to her, but she shared her knowledge with none.

Thursday is Thor's day; and next to Odin, Thor was the greatest of the gods, and his palace the largest in all Asgarth. In strength of body he excelled all gods and men, and his power was doubled when he put on his girdle of might. His favourite weapon was his hammer Mjolner, which he grasped in hands clad in iron gauntlets. Thor did not ride on horseback like the other gods, but drove in a huge chariot whose wheels were made of thunder. It was drawn by two goats, one of which was lame. Once on his travels Thor came to the hut of some very poor peasants. They had nothing to eat themselves nor to set before their guest. Thor said he would provide supper for them all. He killed the goats with his own hand, and told his host to cook the meat. Only he must be sure to throw the bones in heaps on the skins. Next morning Thor got up early and went out to the place where the skins and bones lay in two heaps. He waved his hammer over these, and the goats jumped up hale and well. But one of them limped with his hind leg. When Thor called out angrily and asked whether any one had tampered with the bones, the peasant's son Thialfe confessed that he had split one of the shank bones to get at the marrow. At this Thor flew into a violent rage and threatened to kill the whole family, but when they begged and prayed for forgiveness he consented to spare their lives, if the peasant would give him his son and daughter as servants. Thus Thialfe (Labour) and Roskva (Speed) became Thor's attendants, and went with him on all his travels. But the goat never recovered from its lameness.



FREYA.

Tuesday was named after Tyr. This was the god who gave men wisdom and cunning. He had only one hand, but he was more than a match for many that fought with two.

Friday was named after Freya, the greatest of all the goddesses. It was she who led the Valkyries to battle; and when she took part in the fight herself, half of the killed fell to her share, and half to Odin's. Her palace, too, had a large hall where warriors feasted, and Freya and her maids made them welcome. She used to ride in a car drawn by two cats; but when she put on her falcon robe, she could fly through the air faster than any bird.

Frey, her brother, was the god to whom men prayed for a fruitful harvest, and it was he who sent rain and sunshine in their due seasons. His wife was Gerda, a daughter of the giants, and the most beautiful woman in the world. One day Frey had been up to the high hill where Odin's throne stood, and taken his seat here to look over sea and land. Far away to the north he saw a tall and stately house in a wood. A girl was at the door, and as she raised her hand to lift the latch, air and earth and sky were reflected from her white arms. Then Frey's heart was filled with love for the maid, and day and night he could not rest for thinking how he might win her as his bride. At last he decided to send his servant Skirner to ask her hand in marriage. He was unwilling to go on any errand to Giant-land; but at last he consented, when Frey promised to give him his sword, which was of such wondrous make that it could fight alone, unguided by any hand.

Then Skirner set out to find Gerda. First he offered her gifts if she would come with him to Asgarth; but she only laughed at these, saying that her father had gold and silver in plenty. Next he tried threats, telling her of the

8 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

sorrows that should befall her, and that if she would not wed with Frey she should pass her life unmated in loneliness and longing. Then at last she yielded, and came to Asgarth as the bride of Frey.

Asgarth, the home of the Asers, was high above Midgarth; and as the gods often travelled to and fro, they built a rainbow bridge to cross by, which they called Bifrost. It was of three colours—red, blue, and yellow. The red was of burning fire, so that the wicked giants, who hated the gods, might not pass over it and attack the citadel of Asgarth. For it had been foretold that one day the Flame Giants would gather their hosts together against the gods. Then the bridge would break down beneath their weight, and they would wade through streams and stride over mountains, and so reach Asgarth at last. Therefore watch was always kept at the frontiers, and a special guard was posted near Bifrost to keep a look-out for the approach of an enemy. Here stood the house of the god Heimdall, just by the bridge. He needed less sleep than a bird, and by night, as well as by day, could see as far as a man can travel in a hundred days. He could hear the grass grow on the ground, and the wool on the sheep's backs. He kept watch by the bridge night and day, ready to sound the alarm with his trumpet Giallar-horn if he saw any of the giants approaching.

The giants themselves lived on the borders of the ocean that flowed all round the world. Some of the biggest and fiercest lived in Utgarth (Outland), the Frost Giants lived in Nifelheim (the Home of Mist), and the Flame Giants in Muspelheim (the Home of Fire).

The elves lived in Elfand, and the dwarfs in Dwarf-land, where they did wonderful work in metal far away under the ground.

HOW THOR GOT HIS HAMMER.

LOKE, a mischievous god, who was always playing tricks on the rest, one day cut off all the goddess Sif's hair. Thor, who was her husband, was very angry, and would have broken Loke's bones, had he not promised to provide new hair for Sif more beautiful even than what she had had before. Loke therefore went down to Dwarfland, and there sought out the dwarfs that were said to be most skilled in metal-work, and begged them to make golden tresses for Sif. They did as he bade them, and they also made a wonderful spear and a magic ship. Then they gave the spear and the ship to Loke, as well as the beautiful hair. Loke was delighted, and went about boasting of the wonderful treasures that had been given him. He even made a wager with another dwarf called Brock that his brother Sindre, cunning smith as he was, would not be able to make three such precious objects. Sindre accepted the wager, and set to work at once. First he put a boar's hide in his forge, and told Brock to work the bellows, and he must not stop blowing even for a second till what was put in had been taken out.

Brock blew with all his might; but no sooner had he begun to work the bellows than a fly settled on his hand and stung it, but Brock did not stop blowing. Presently Sindre came back, and took out a boar with golden bristles. After this he put gold in the forge, and bade his brother work as before. The fly now settled on Brock's neck, and stung him worse than before; but still he never stopped the bellows. Presently Sindre came back again, and drew out a golden ring. Next he put iron in the forge, and bade Brock work harder than ever. This

10 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

time the fly settled between his eyes, and stung him so severely that the blood dropped down, and he was forced to brush it away with his hand: so, for the space of one second, the bellows stopped. Then Sindre came back, and took a hammer out of the forge. It was perfect in shape, but the handle was rather short, because the bellows had stopped working for the space of a second.

Brock now took the boar and the ring and the hammer, and went to Asgarth, to show them to the gods. Then they went to the great hall and sat on their thrones, and it was settled that Odin, Thor, and Frey should judge between him and Loke. First of all Loke spoke. He showed the golden tresses, and the spear, and the ship, and said that the hair would grow as soon as it was placed on Sif's head, the spear would never miss its aim, and the ship would never lack a favourable breeze, and though it was large enough to carry all the gods and their armies, it could be folded up like a kerchief and put in a man's pocket.

Brock now produced his treasures, and told of their wonderful powers. The ring was the most beautiful ever made, and every ninth night eight others just like it would drop from it. The boar would run day and night, through air and water alike, swifter than any horse, and, no matter how great the darkness, the sheen of his bristles would always show the way. As for the hammer, it would never break, no matter how hard the blows it dealt; and however far it was thrown, it would always return to the hand that cast it. It could also change its size, and might be made small enough to be hidden in a man's bosom. Then the gods, who wanted a good weapon for fighting their enemies, decided that the hammer was the best of all the treasures, and gave judgment for Brock. The ring and spear were given to Odin, the ship and boar

to Frey, the hair ever after grew on Sif's head; but the hammer, the chief of all the treasures, was given to Thor, and with it he slew many a foe, and wrought all manner of mighty deeds, which you will read about presently.

HOW THE WOLF WAS BOUND.

WHENEVER there was trouble in Asgarth, it was almost always Loke that was the cause. Although he lived in Asgarth, and was counted among the Asers, he was the son of giants, and more akin to them than to the gods. As for his children, they were worse even than himself. He married a hideous giantess, and she bore him a daughter called Hel, and two horrible monsters—a snake and a wolf. Now there was an ancient prophecy, that the offspring of Loke should bring destruction to Asgarth, and to prevent this, if possible, Odin sent messengers to Giantland, to fetch Loke's children. When they were brought he took the snake and threw it into the ocean, and it grew and grew until its head and tail met, and it surrounded the whole earth. This monster was known as the Midgarth snake. Hel he cast down to Nifelheim, and gave her power over nine worlds. There she ruled over all the dead, except the happy warriors who fell by the sword, and went to feast in Valhalla. Her hall was called Wretchedness, Hunger was her dish, Greed her knife, Idleness and Sloth her man and maid, Ruin was her threshold, Sorrow her bed, and round it hung threatening evil like a curtain. Still her kingdom was not wholly bad, for dwellings were assigned to the departed according as their lives had been good or ill. Hel herself had a double aspect, for she was partly black and partly of

12 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

human colour. Hers was a very powerful kingdom, and she was a mighty goddess.

As for the Fenrir's-wolf, the gods thought it safest to bring him up under their own eyes. Tyr took him his food every day, and as he grew very big and strong, the gods were afraid to let him run about at large, and resolved to chain him up. This was no easy matter, for he was far too large and fierce to be bound against his will. So they told him they wanted to test his strength, and would bind him with a chain just to see whether he could break it or not. The wolf looked at the chain, and as it did not appear very formidable, he said he would try. When they thought he was securely fastened, he stretched himself and the chain snapped in two. Then the gods forged another chain, much stronger than the first. The wolf, who knew that his strength had grown since the last trial, made no difficulty about having it put on, and he broke this as easily as the first. The gods now realized that no common chain could bind the Fenrir's-wolf, and they must have recourse to magic. They therefore sent Skirner, Frey's servant, to the dwarfs and begged them to forge a chain that nothing could break. They consented, and fashioned the cord called Gleipner. It was made of six things: the sound of a cat's footstep, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the sinews of a bear, the voice of a fish, and the spittle of a bird. Now all these things have no existence, and therefore they could never be destroyed. This cord was as thin and soft as silk, but so tough and firm that nothing could tear it. Each of the gods tried it, but tug as they might, it would not give way. Then they asked the wolf to try it, saying it would be a proud thing to do what all the gods had failed to accomplish. But he suspected a trick, and said, "Even if I do break such a slender cord as this, the feat will not bring me

uch honour ; but if there is some trickery and cunning out it, I will allow no one to put it on me."

Then the gods said, "Surely you will not find it hard to tear a silken cord, you that have broken fetters of iron ! But if you try and fail we shall set you free at once, for we shall know that you are not strong enough to do us any real injury."

"The wolf answered, "If you bind me so fast that I cannot free myself you will only mock at me, and it will be useless for me to call on you for aid ; therefore I do not care to put on this chain. But lest you should reproach me with cowardice, I will consent if one of you will place his hand in my mouth as a pledge of good faith."

At this the gods looked at one another, and for a long while no one spoke. At last Tyr offered to put his hand in the wolf's jaws, and they bound him with the chain-leipner. The beast stretched and pulled, but the harder he pulled, the stronger and firmer grew the cord. At this all the gods laughed, all except Tyr, for he had lost his right hand.

The gods now fastened the end of the chain to a huge rock, which they fixed down in the depths of the earth with another heavy mass on the top, to hold it in its place. When the wolf tried to snap at them with wide open jaws, they thrust a sword into his mouth with the point upwards. Thus he remained bound until the latter days, when twilight fell on the realm of the gods.

HOW THOR WENT AMONG THE GIANTS

ONCE upon a time Thor set out in search of adventures, and took with him Loke and Thialfe. After a while they came to the sea. They crossed in a boat, and on the

14 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

other side found themselves in a dense forest. All day long they walked in it, and at dusk they sought a shelter for the night. Presently they saw a good-sized hut with a door that took up the whole front of the building. There were no people about, they went in, and lay down to rest. In the middle of the night they were aroused by a terrible noise. The hut shook, the ground rocked under their feet, and they felt sure that nothing but an earthquake could have caused all this commotion. They got up and looked about them, and then they noticed a little outhouse on the right-hand side of the hut. Into this they crept, quaking with fear, and not one of them had another wink of sleep that night. As for Thor, he sat in the doorway, grasping his hammer in both hands, that he might be ready to hurl it at any one who tried to attack them. However, nothing else happened to disturb them, and at dawn they went outside and saw a great giant lying at a little distance from the hut. He was fast asleep and snoring, and this was the noise that had frightened them in the night and caused the earth to shake.

In the daylight things did not seem quite so terrible, and Thor, taking the precaution to put on his girdle of might, summoned up courage to ask the big man his name. He answered in a friendly manner—

“My name is Skrymer. As for you, I need not ask your name, for I am quite sure you are Thor. But what have you done with my glove?”

Then he stretched out his hand and picked up the glove from the hut in which the gods had spent the night; for this was the giant's glove, and its thumb was the outhouse.

Skrymer now proposed that they should all travel together. And he said it would be better to make common stock of their provisions. So he put them all in his

NOW THOR WENT AMONG THE GIANTS 15

own bag, tied it up tightly, and threw it across his shoulders.

They now set out together, and the gods found it hard work to keep up with the giant's pace. At nightfall they took up their quarters under an oak. Skrymer said he was not hungry, and would go to sleep at once, but he gave Thor the bag and bade him get supper for his party. Thor took it, and tried to undo the knots with which it was fastened, but though he put forth all his strength, he could not make the cord budge. This made him furious, for he was very hungry, and he dealt Skrymer a blow on the head with his hammer. It aroused the giant, and he muttered that a leaf must have fallen from the tree. When he fell asleep again. Thor and Loke now gave up all hope of supper, and lay down under another oak, but they were too frightened to sleep. At midnight Skrymer was snoring so loudly that the wood re-echoed the noise. This made Thor even more angry, and he took his hammer and dealt the giant a second blow, much harder than the first. This time the hammer made a dent in the skull, and Thor could see it sink down into the giant's head. Again Skrymer woke up, and said—

“Has an acorn fallen on my head, or is anything the matter with you, Thor?”

Then Thor said he had just woke up and was going to sleep again. But he resolved to deal Skrymer a third blow, harder than either of the others. Just before dawn, when he was sleeping more soundly than ever, Thor struck Skrymer on the temple with such force that the hammer entered right in, and the handle disappeared. Then the giant sat up, and said—

“Surely there must be birds in this tree, for something hard fell on my head just now. But it is time to be off, Thor, and I will set you on the way to Utgarth,

where you say you are going. There you will see plenty of men bigger than I am. And I will give you one piece of advice before we part. When you get to Utgarth be sure to demean yourselves modestly, for Utgarthloke, the king, and his men will not stand any insolence from such little fellows as you. If you cannot make up your mind to this, you had better turn back at once; but if you decide to go on, your road lies to the east. Mine is far to the north, so I will bid you farewell."

Thor and his companions now continued their journey, and at midday they came to a great castle. In front was a gate, which was locked, but they contrived to squeeze in between the bars. Next they passed through an open doorway, and came to a large hall, where sat a number of giants with Utgarthloke, the king, at their head. The travellers saluted him politely, and he greeted them with a smile.

"It is not often that travellers tell true tales," said he, "but, after all, it may be so. And yet—can this little fellow really be the thunderer Thor? Perhaps, however, your looks belie you, and you are really stronger than you seem. Anyway, tell me what skill you and your comrades boast of; for we receive no one here who is not distinguished in some way above his fellows."

Then Loke answered, "There is one thing I understand better than most people. I will undertake to eat my food faster than any one in this hall."

"Good!" said Utgarthloke. "We will put you to the test."

Thereupon he ordered a great trough to be filled with meat and brought in. Loke was to begin eating at one end, and at the other Loge, the giant who had been chosen for this competition. They both ate as hard as they could without stopping, and they met midway. But it turned out that while Loke had eaten all the meat off the bones,

Loge had consumed the bones and the trough as well. So he was declared victor.

Next Thialfe was asked what he could do. He answered that he would beat any of them at running. They went out accordingly to a field where there was a clear course for racing, and Utgarthloke called a boy named Huge, and bade him race with Thialfe. In the first heat Huge was so far ahead that he turned back at the end of the course and met Thialfe; in the second, Huge got in while Thialfe was still within an arrow's shot of the goal; and in the third, he won when Thialfe was only half-way. So the gods lost the second competition as well as the first.

Then Thor was asked what great feat he could perform to justify his reputation. He answered that he would engage to win a drinking match, no matter whom they might choose to compete with him.

Utgarthloke now ordered the great horn to be brought from which his courtiers were in the habit of drinking. He handed it to Thor, and said—

“We call a man a good drinker who empties this horn at one draught, and a tolerable one if he empties it in two; but there is not one among us who would not easily manage it in three draughts.”

Thor took the horn, and examined it. It did not seem so excessively big, though it was certainly very long; and as he was extremely thirsty after his long tramp, he thought he could manage it easily enough. He took a long pull, and did not stop till his breath gave out. Then he looked into the horn, and it seemed almost as full as before. Utgarthloke said—

“Well, you certainly have not drunk much, and I should never have believed it, had any one told me that Thor was such a poor drinker; still I have no doubt you will empty it at the next draught.”

18 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

Then Thor set it to his lips again. The second draught was much longer than the first, but when he looked inside there did not seem much of the ale gone, though the horn could now be moved without risk of spilling. But the giants began to mock at Thor, and to taunt him with being an empty boaster; and in a rage he seized the horn once more, and drank and drank till at last he could swallow no more, and handed it back without emptying it.

Of course the giants jeered at him now, and called him a feeble fellow; whereat he flew into a violent passion, and said they had better try his strength in some other way. Utgarthloke replied—

“Our young folks sometimes amuse themselves by lifting up my cat from the ground. It does not require much strength, and I should not have ventured to propose such an easy feat to Thor, had I not already seen for myself that his might is far less than men say.”

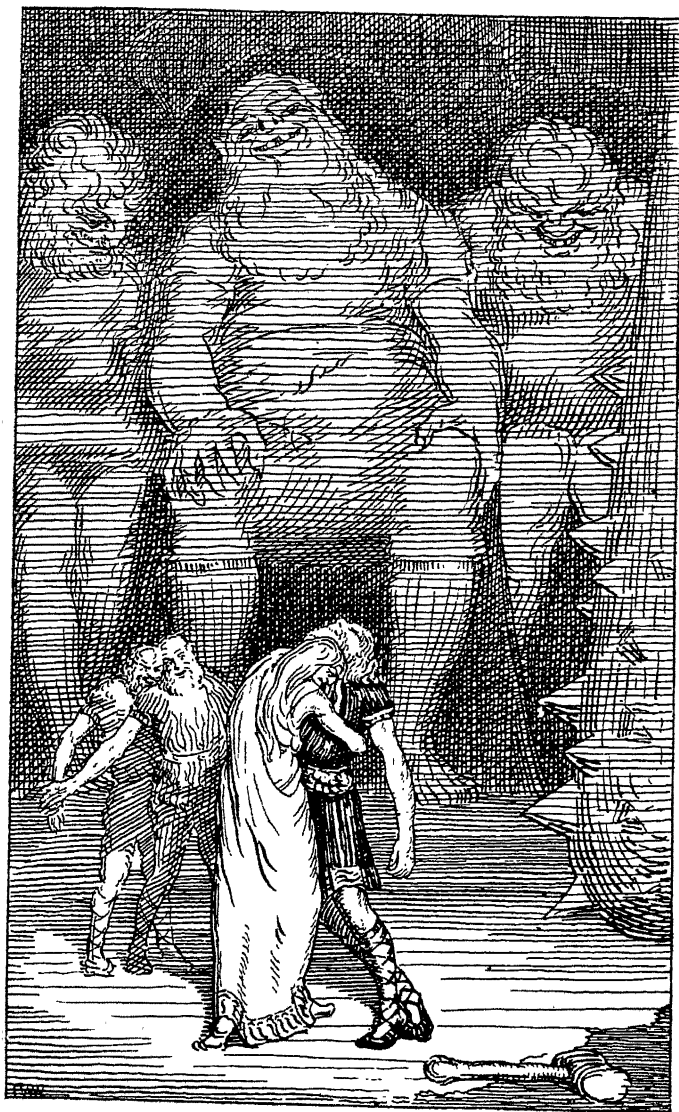
While he spoke a large grey cat came jumping into the hall, and Thor took hold of it and tried to raise it from the ground. But though he put out all his strength, he only managed to lift one of its paws. Then Utgarthloke said—

“This is pretty much what I expected, for the cat is a large one and Thor but a little fellow compared with our men.”

At this Thor flew into a worse rage than before, and said—

“Small as I am, I will undertake to wrestle with any man among you.”

“Nay,” said Utgarthloke, “it would be mere child’s play for the men here to wrestle with you. Send some one to fetch my old nurse Elle. She has thrown many a man before now who was no weaker than you.”



THOR WRESTLES WITH OLD AGE.

So Thor was set to wrestle with the old woman, but he had no better luck than before. For his adversary stood against all his attacks, and at last she seized hold of him and threw him on his knees.

This was the last of the competitions, and the gods had been beaten in every one. It was now late, and the giants offered their guests entertainment for the night, but they were to be off in the morning. At daybreak Thor and his companions set out on their homeward journey. Utgarthloke went a little way with them, and at parting he asked Thor whether he was satisfied with the result of his journey, and whether he had met with any one stronger than himself? Thor answered in a very subdued manner, saying that he feared he had added but little to his reputation. Then the giant said with a smile—

“Well, I will tell you the truth now that you are out of my castle, which, as long as I live, you shall never enter again, if I can help it. Indeed, I should never have let you in at all, had I had any idea of your strength, for you nearly brought a dire calamity on us. Know, then, that you have been made the victim of illusion. It was I myself who met you in the forest, and I tied up the sack of provisions with iron bands, to keep you from opening it. Afterwards you dealt me three blows with your hammer, the weakest of which would have given me my death had it hit me. Perhaps you may have noticed in my hall a great boulder with three large square dents in it. Those were the marks left by your blows. I held up the rock to cover me, but you were not able to see it. And I served you in the same way in all the trials of strength. Loke consumed an enormous quantity of food, but his antagonist was Raging Fire, which can devour all things. Huge, who raced with Thialfe, was my Thought,

and no runner on earth can travel as fast. But when you drank out of the horn and could not empty it, that was the greatest marvel of all. For the end of the horn rested in the sea; and when you get back to the coast you will find out what a mighty draught you took, for it has brought on a low tide out of season. And you performed another wonderful feat when you tried to lift the cat: indeed, if the truth must be told, we were all in terror when we saw her paw off the ground. For this was not a cat at all, but the Midgarth snake that encircles the earth. You pulled so hard that the head and tail were drawn apart, and it was nearly lifted up to the sky. As for your wrestling bout with Elle, it was no shame to be thrown by her, for there never was, nor will be, any man so strong but one day Old Age shall give him a fall. Now go your way in peace, and it will be best for both of us not to meet again. But if ever you return to my hall, be sure I shall contrive to trick you again as I did this time."

When Thor heard this he grew very angry, and grasped his hammer, meaning to hurl it at Utgarthloke. But he was nowhere to be seen, and when Thor would have turned back to attack the castle, that too had disappeared, and there was nothing in sight but level plains and green fields. So the Thunderer was forced to turn his steps homeward, vowing vengeance in his heart.

HOW THOR WENT FISHING.

ONCE upon a time the Asers were invited to a feast by Aeger, a sea-god, whom they held in honour, and admitted to their own table at Asgarth. Therefore he made ready a splendid banquet, so that he might give them fitting

entertainment in return. The table was laid with gold and silver, and meat of every kind was set before the guests. But there was nothing to drink, and Thor cried out for beer. Aeger, who was annoyed at his guest's rudeness, answered—

“Gladly would I brew as much ale as you can drink, but I have no cauldron large enough. If you can procure one for me, I will try to satisfy your thirst.”

Thor did not like to refuse, but he did not know where to find a vessel large enough. Tyr, however, came to his assistance.

“Far from here, in the realm of mist and cloud, lives the wise giant Hymer, whose wife and mother are my kith and kin. He has an enormous cauldron, a whole fathom deep. He will not give it to you of his own free will, but I will go with you and together we shall contrive to get it by cunning.”

Thor thanked him, and the two set out together. After they had journeyed for a long while they came to Hymer's castle. The giant was not at home, but they found his wife and mother. One was a horrible monster with nine hundred heads, the other was fair and golden-haired, and she received them kindly and gave them drink. Then she said—

“Now, my kinsman, though you are welcome to me, I must hide you away, for sometimes my husband comes home in a bad temper, and then he is not kindly disposed to guests.”

So she found a hiding-place for them among the pots and kettles.

Presently Hymer came home from the hunt, and as he entered the room a chilly blast came in along with him, and outside the glaciers roared and thundered. For Hymer was a frost-giant. Then his wife said—

"Welcome home, Hymer." I have good news for you. Our kinsman from Asgarth is come and with him the god Thor, the friend of man. They are over there at the end of the hall, hiding behind a pillar."

Hymer turned and looked in that direction, and his glance was so piercing that it split open the pillar, and the rafters of the ceiling cracked. Eight of the kettles fell down and broke, only one of hammered iron remained intact.

Then the guests crept out of their hiding-place, and the giant had three oxen killed and roasted, to make a feast in their honour. Thor, who had an enormous appetite, ate up two of the oxen by himself. The next day there was no food left in the castle, and the giant said if they wanted anything to eat they must go out hunting for themselves.

"Good," said Thor, "I will go fishing with you."

Hymer laughed and said, "What is the good of taking you? You are much too young and too small to be of any use to me. Besides, you would be sure to catch a chill if I were to row out as far and stay out as long as is my wont."

These taunting words made Thor very angry, and he said—

"Take me with you all the same, and we shall see which of us will first want to turn back."

Thor now asked Hymer where he could get bait, and the giant bade him seek it for himself. Thor looked about him, and noticed that Hymer's cattle were grazing close at hand. He seized the largest of the oxen, and wrenched off its head. This he took with him as bait, for he was in search of no small prey. Then he leapt into the boat, seized a pair of oars and rowed so hard that they very soon reached the spot where the giant was in the

habit of fishing. Hymer called to his companion to stop, but Thor said he preferred to go on. After a while Hymer called to him again, and said it was not safe to go much further, as they were getting near the haunts of the Midgarth snake.

"So much the better," said Thor, and he rowed on faster than before.

At last he shipped his oars, and they began to fish. Hymer caught two whales, but Thor brought out a huge line with an enormous hook, and fastened the head of the ox on it. Then he cast it in the water. No sooner did he let it drop than the Midgarth-snake snapped at it, and the hook stuck in its palate. When the creature felt the hook it pulled so hard that Thor was thrown against the edge of the boat. This sent him into one of his rages, and putting forth the whole of his strength he planted his feet against the bottom of the boat with such violence that they broke through the boards and left him standing on the floor of the sea. Then he pulled and pulled with all his might, and had all but got the snake on board. Seeing this Hymer grew frightened, and he turned quite pale and trembled when he saw the dreadful monster getting near his boat and the sea pouring in on all sides. Just as Thor raised his hammer to give the snake its death-blow, Hymer darted forward and cut the line, so that the snake fell back into the sea with a tremendous splash. Thor leapt in after it, and some people declare that he killed it in the water; but others say that it remained in its old place, awaiting the end of all things. And certainly this must be the true account, for else how could the Snake have fought with the giants against the gods in the last battle on the plain of Vigrid?

By this time Hymer had discovered that his guest was a very formidable person, and for a long time he had not

courage to speak to him. At last, as they drew near land, he said—

“Which share of the work will you undertake now? Will you carry home the whales, or make the boat fast?”

Without a word Thor seized the boat, oars and rudder and all, and never even stopped to bale out the water, but carried it unaided to shore. Then he took the whales and brought them in too. For his strength was wonderful, beyond that of all gods and men, and he could not have been worsted at Utgarth except by trickery.

But when they had come to his castle, Hymer began to taunt Thor afresh.

“Certainly,” he said, “you know how to row, and are a good bit stronger than I thought; but I shall not consider you a really strong man unless you can break this cup of mine.”

Thor took the cup in his hands, and had a good look at it. He threw it first in one direction, then in another, trying to break it against stone and iron, but it always returned unhurt into Hymer’s hands.

At last the giant’s wife whispered in Thor’s ear, “Throw it at Hymer’s head; for this is the only thing that is harder than the cup.”

So Thor put forth all his might, and threw the cup at the giant’s head. Hymer took no hurt from the blow, but the cup was shattered to atoms.

Then Hymer was filled with grief at the loss of his cup.

“Alas!” he cried, “my chief joy in life is gone now that my cup is broken. But though you have performed such great feats, I shall not yield the palm of strength to you unless you can lift that cauldron yonder and carry it out of the hall.”

Thor now called on Tyr to have the first try, but it

was no use. Twice he grasped the huge vessel in his arms, but not an inch did it budge. So he gave in and bade Thor try. He took firm hold of the rim, and with a mighty effort carried it down the hall and out at the door. Tyr followed him, and they ran off at full speed, and Thor carried the cauldron. Only when they were far away from the castle did they stop to look round, and then they saw that Hymer, with a crowd of the many-headed mountain-folk, was in pursuit. Thor now set down the cauldron, and threw Miolner at his pursuers. One and all they fell dead, and the hammer returned to his hand. Then Thor and Tyr continued their journey, and came in safety to Aeger's palace. From this time forth the gods used to assemble there yearly at the flax harvest to drink fresh ale brewed in Hymer's cauldron.

HOW THOR AND HRUNGNER FOUGHT IN SINGLE COMBAT.

ONCE upon a time, when Thor had gone on one of his expeditions in search of adventure, Odin mounted his eight-footed horse Sleipner and rode towards Giant-land. As he drew near a giant, Hrungner, spied him, and wondered who the stranger might be, who came in a helmet of glittering gold and could ride alike through earth and water. So he went down to speak with him, and began to praise his horse. Odin said that it was indeed a beautiful creature, and he would take any wager that there was none so good in Giant-land. Hrungner, however, would not hear of this, and maintained that his own horse Goldfaxe could beat Sleipner in running. To

prove his words he mounted the horse, and gave Odin chase, intending to pay him out for his boasting. Odin rode so fast that he kept a good way ahead, but the giant, in his eagerness to catch him up, never noticed that he had crossed the boundaries of Asgarth and was in land belonging to the gods. These received him courteously, as was due to a guest, and invited him to sup with them in Valhalla. And as he was a big, strong man, and they thought he would prove a hearty drinker, they set before him the two cups from which Thor was in the habit of drinking. The giant soon emptied them both; and the more he drank the more boastful he grew, till at last he vowed that he would carry their great hall with him to Giant-land and destroy Asgarth, killing all the gods except Freya and Sif. These he would keep as his wives.

Of course the gods were very angry when Hrungner went on boasting, and they began to wish that Thor would come home and put a stop to it. Happily it was not long before the Thunderer put in an appearance, and he grew furious when he saw one of his enemies feasting in Valhalla, and Freya pouring out mead for him as though he were one of themselves. Hrungner said that he was there by Odin's invitation, and no lesser god should offer him insults. But Thor replied angrily that Hrungner should live to rue the day when he entered Asgarth. The giant, who by this time was quite sober, answered—

“You will not gain much honour, Thor, by attacking me here unarmed. Better come with me to the boundary between the two kingdoms, where we can fight undisturbed. I was a fool to come away without my shield and whetstone. If I had them here we could fight at once, but as it is it would be a mean trick to kill a defenceless foe.”

Thor was quite ready to fall in with this proposal, for there was nothing he liked better than a good square fight. The time and place for the contest were arranged, and both sides made their preparations. All the giants were in the greatest excitement, for Hrungner was their strongest champion, and if they lost him it would be no laughing matter. They therefore insisted that he must have a second to help him in the fight. For this purpose they fashioned an enormous clay giant, nine fathoms high and three broad. They could not find any heart large enough to put in him, till at last they took one belonging to a mare. This filled up the space, but it was of little use, for its owner had been a timid creature. Hrungner himself had a heart of stone. His head was of stone too, and so was his shield, and his weapon was an enormous whetstone.

These two were now fully equipped, and stood drawn up ready for the fight. It was not long before Thor came up with Thialfe, who ran on ahead and said to the giant—

“You are but poorly guarded, Hrungner, though you hold your great shield before you. For Thor has seen you, and is going down under the ground so as to attack you from below.”

At this the giant laid his shield on the ground and stood on it, all the while grasping his whetstone tightly in his hands.

Suddenly a terrible flash of lightning was seen, and the thunder began to crash, and in the midst of the storm Thor appeared and let fly his hammer with all his might. Then the giant was forced to protect himself with his whetstone, for his shield lay useless on the ground. Mjolner struck the stone, and it broke in two. One half fell into the ground, and out of this all the whetstones in the world are made. The other struck against Thor's

HOW THOR FETCHED MIOLNER HOME 29

head and threw him to the ground. The giant's skull was cracked by the force of the blow, and he too fell forward on the ground. There he lay, right across Thor, with his foot on the god's neck, pinning him to the earth. Thialfe, who meantime had easily disposed of the clay giant, ran forward to lift Hrungner's foot from Thor's neck; but he put forth all his strength in vain. The other gods, who were on the spot by now, tried one after another, but with no better success.

At last Magne, Thor's three-year-old son, came running up, and without the least difficulty raised the foot.

"Ashamed and disgraced am I, father," he cried, "that I came so late, for I doubt not but one blow from my fist would have sent Hrungner to the house of Hel!"

Then Thor rejoiced at his son's courage and strength, and gave him the giant's horse, Goldfaxe, as a reward. But the stone remained sticking in Thor's head; and though the enchantress Groa sang magic songs over him till it grew loose and nearly came away, she forgot her charms before the spell was complete, in her joy at the good news he brought her of her husband, and the stone remained sticking in Thor's head. Therefore, men used to say, people should throw away all stones of the sort, because that would help to loosen the grindstone in Thor's head.

HOW THOR FETCHED MIOLNER HOME.

ONE hot day, when Thor had stretched himself out under a tree and fallen asleep, a wicked giant named Thrym crept up to him and carried off his hammer. Presently the god awoke; and when he missed his precious weapon,

he was in despair, for without it the better part of his strength was gone. All about the forest he went seeking it, and at last, when it could nowhere be found, he went to Loke, and implored him to use all his cunning to find out where the hammer was hidden. Loke, who, for all his love of mischief, was very good-natured, said he would go and look for it if Freya would lend him her falcon-robe. So they went together to her palace, and begged her to lend it.

Then Freya answered, "You should have it, Thor, though it were of silver or gold."

Loke immediately put on the robe, and flew away in the guise of a bird. Soon he had left Asgarth behind him, and the towers of Giant-land came into view. There on a high hill Loke caught sight of Thrym. He was putting collars of gold on the necks of his dogs, and combing the long manes of his horses.

"What news in Asgarth and Elfland?" cried the giant. "And why do you fare all alone to Giant-land?"

"Evil are the tidings from Asgarth and Elfland. Thor's hammer has disappeared. Do you know where it is hidden?"

"I myself have hidden Thor's hammer eight fathoms under the earth, and no one shall win it back again unless he brings with him Freya as my bride."

When Loke had heard Thrym's answer, he flew away once more. Loud rustled the wings of the falcon-robe as he left Giant-land far behind and came once more to Asgarth. At his palace gates stood Thor, and he greeted Loke thus—

"Come hither and tell me your news. Have you done my bidding and found the hammer?"

"I have done your bidding and found the hammer. Thrym, Prince of Giants, has it in his keeping, and he

vows that no one shall win it back again, unless he bring with him Freya as the giant's bride."

Then Thor went straightway to Freya, and begged her to put on bridal attire and go with him to Giant-land. When he had finished speaking she flew into such a passion that her necklace fell from her neck, and she cried again and again that never would she travel with Thor to Giant-land.

A meeting was now called of all the gods to discuss the best means of getting back the hammer. One proposed one thing, and one another, till at last Heimdall the Wise spoke thus—

"Suppose we dress up Thor in bridal array? Let him wear a long robe and a veil, and put Freya's necklace on his neck, and carry her bunch of keys. In this disguise he may go to Giant-land and win back the hammer himself."

All the gods thought this an excellent plan; only Thor objected.

"The gods would all mock at me," he said, "if I were to put on the dress of a maid."

But Loke said, "Be silent, Thor, and do not make foolish objections; for the giants will make their home in Asgarth before long, unless you get back your hammer."

So Thor agreed, much against his will. They dressed him in bridal array, put a long robe and a veil upon him; then they hung Freya's jewels round his neck, and her bunch of keys at his side.

"Now," said Loke, "it is my turn to dress up, for I am going along with you as your maid."

When both were ready, and all the gods had approved their disguise, the goats were harnessed to Thor's chariot, and the travellers set out.

A long way off Thrym saw them coming, and called to his servants to prepare a great feast.

"Riches have I in plenty," he cried, "cows with gold-tipped horns, oxen black as ravens, jewels and treasures more than man could count; one thing only I lacked—a goddess bride. And now Freya herself comes hither to wed me."

So a splendid marriage feast was made ready, and there was meat and drink in plenty to suit giant appetites. But, strange to tell, the bride seemed hungrier than any! She ate a whole ox and eight salmon, as well as all the sweetmeats that had been provided for the maids, and she drank three barrels of mead. All the guests wondered at this, and at last the bridegroom said—

"Never have I seen a bride eat so greedily, nor a maid drink so much mead."

But Loke said, "Freya has eaten nothing for eight days, so great was her longing for Giant-land."

At this Thrym thought he might venture to steal a kiss, and tried to lift the bride's veil; but she started back in anger.

"How terribly Freya's eyes flash in her head!" he cried. "Her very glance seems to burn me up."

But Loke said, "For eight nights Freya has known no sleep, so great was her longing for Giant-land."

Now Thrym called for the hammer. "Bring hither Miolner," he cried, "that I may consecrate my bride with the sacred hammer."

Then some of the attendants brought it, and it was laid on the bride's lap. And Thor's heart laughed within him when he once more grasped his trusty weapon. In an instant he seized it and brandished it in the air; then he hurled it, first at the bridegroom, then at the guests, and one and all they fell before Miolner. :

This is how Thor brought Miolner home.

HOW THOR WENT TO GEIRRODSGARTH.

LOKE did Thor a good turn when he helped him get back his hammer; and it was not long before Thor had an opportunity of showing his gratitude. Loke was a reckless fellow, and just as likely to get himself into trouble as other people; and he loved to go about seeking for fresh adventures. One day, when Freya had again lent him her falcon robe, he flew in the guise of a bird in the direction of Giant-land. Presently he came to the castle of Geirroth, and, being curious to know what was going on inside, he perched on a window-sill and peeped in. Now, Geirroth caught sight of the bird, and bade one of his attendants go and fetch it in. Loke did not intend to be caught, but he hoped to befool the servant who was climbing up the wall after him. He meant to remain perched there till the last moment, and then spread his wings and fly away. But his pursuer was too quick for him, and carried him off to the giant. When Geirroth looked into the falcon's eyes, he guessed that this was no common bird, and ordered it to speak if it could; but Loke kept silence.

He was now shut up in a chest, and kept there without food for three months. Then Geirroth took him out, and again bade him speak, if he knew how. Loke was so hungry and so tired of his confinement that he not only spoke to his captor, but told him all the truth, saying that he was Loke, a god, and that he had flown over from Asgarth, in search of adventure.

"Well," said Geirroth, "you are in my power now, and, as you know, I have no love for the Asers. But I am willing to spare your life on one condition. If you will

34 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

undertake to bring Thor the Mighty to Geirrodsgarth without either his hammer or his girdle of might, then I will grant you your life and your liberty."

Loke promised, for he knew that Thor would do what he could to help him, since, but for Loke, he would have lost his hammer for good and all. And, in fact, Thor consented without much persuasion, for he loved an adventure, and he thought his own unaided strength would bring him safely through this one. The two therefore set out for Geirrodsgarth, but as the way was a long one, they took shelter for the night with a giantess named Grid, who was the mother of Vidar, the silent god. She told them that Geirrod was a very cunning and cruel giant, and said it needed more than Thor's own strength to vanquish him, but she would lend him weapons which, though inferior to his own, would yet help him through this adventure. So she gave him her own girdle of might and her iron gauntlets and staff, and, armed with these, he set out once more.

Presently they came to Vimur, which is the largest river in the world. There was no bridge across, and the travellers had to ford it. Thor now put on the girdle he had borrowed, and supported himself on his staff, that he might not be carried away by the current. Loke clung to the girdle, and so was carried over. When they were about half-way, the river began to rise, and the waters rose so fast that they soon touched Thor's shoulders. But he said to them—

"Rise not, River, since I must run
Hence to the Giant's Garth,
But if you grow my godlike might
Will stretch to heaven's heights."

Then he looked up-stream, and saw Geirrod's daughter Gialp forcing the water to rise higher and higher.

He took up a huge stone and hurled it at her, crying, "A stream should be dammed at its source!" Thor's shots never missed their aim, and he had no more trouble with Gialp. Then he stretched out one hand and grasped a bush on the other bank, and swung himself to land.

Now they walked on till they reached Geirrodsgarth, and there they were well received and shown into a large guest-chamber. In this room there was only one chair, and when Thor sat down on it, it began to rise in the air, and nearly lifted him to the ceiling. But he thrust Grid's staff against the rafters, and thus forced the chair back to the floor. Then there was a cracking noise, followed by fearful screams. Geirrod's daughters, Gialp and Gneip, were under the chair, and it was their combined strength that had lifted it to the ceiling. Now, they had been crushed down beneath it, and all their bones were broken, so they were well paid for the mean trick they had played on a guest.

Geirrod now bade Thor come to the great hall, and take part in the sports which had been arranged in his honour. Great fires had been lighted all along one side, and, with a pair of tongs, Geirrod pulled out a mass of glowing iron, which he threw at the god. He caught it with the iron gauntlets, and made ready to throw it back. Geirrod, in terror, sprang behind an iron pillar, but Thor threw the bar with such force that it passed through the pillar, and through the giant and the wall behind him and was buried deep in the earth outside the castle. So Thor kept his word to Loke, and also punished Geirrod for his treachery and cruelty.

HOW THE APPLES WERE STOLEN.

ONCE upon a time Odin, Loke, and another god were travelling together in search of adventure. They had to pass through a very desolate country, where there was very little provision to be had. Now, all the gods had excellent appetites, and were no more disposed to go without their meals than mere mortals; and when they caught sight of some cattle grazing in a field, they were delighted at the prospect of getting a good dinner. They seized an ox and killed it, and set to work to cook it; but, boil it as long as they would, it never grew tender. They waited and waited, and piled more wood on the fire; but it was no use, the pot would not boil. At last, as they grew hungrier and hungrier, and more and more impatient, they heard a voice in the oak under which they were sitting say—

“In my branches there sits an eagle, and it is he who keeps your pot from boiling.”

They looked up and saw that a great eagle was perched above their heads.

Then the bird spoke and said, “If you will let me take my fill of the ox, I will let the pot boil.”

“Willingly,” they said. “So long as you help us to our dinner, you shall have all you want for yourself.”

The eagle now flew down and perched on the pot, which boiled immediately. Then he seized both the legs and shoulders of the ox and carried them away. The gods were indignant when they saw the best part of their dinner disappearing, and Loke, in his rage, struck at the bird with a long pole. The point entered its breast and stuck there, and as Loke had fast hold of the other end,

he was lifted up when the eagle rose from the ground, and carried away by it. The eagle flew so near the ground that Loke's feet struck against the trees and roots and shrubs, and his arms were nearly torn out of their sockets; but he could not contrive to free himself. He shrieked and screamed and begged for mercy; and at last the eagle spoke—

"On one condition only will I let you go: that you swear to lure Idun from Asgarth with her apples and hand her over to me."

Idun was a goddess to whose keeping were entrusted the magic apples, which the gods ate in order to renew their youth.

"That will I do," cried poor Loke, who was beside himself with torment.

Then they fixed time and place for their meeting, and Loke was set free. He returned to his comrades, but took care to tell them nothing of this bargain.

Now Loke had to consider how he could contrive to keep his promise; for, after all, he was one of the Asers, and they would think it shame to break a pledged word. When the appointed time drew near, he went to Idun, and invited her to go with him to visit a forest at some little distance from Asgarth.

"It was a beautiful place," he said, "where grew trees taller and finer than any in their own land. And there is one among them that bears apples which are larger and more beautiful even than yours."

"Nay," said Idun, "you will never make me believe that."

"Come and see for yourself," said Loke, laughing. "Seeing is believing. And that we may see which of us is right, you had better bring your own apples along with you, then we can compare them on the spot."

38 *GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH*

So Idun consented to go, for she was nettled at the disparaging way in which Loke spoke of her precious apples. Presently they came to the forest where the giant Thiasse, who in the guise of a bird had carried Loke away, had arranged to meet them. This time he again wore his eagle-robe, and he pounced down on Idun and seized her in his talons and flew off with her as fast as he could.

When the gods found that Idun had disappeared, there was great sorrow and lamentation, for the precious apples too were missing, and this was a terrible thing. The gods now grew old like mortal men, their hair became grey, their limbs waxed feeble, for all the joy and gladness of youth had departed with Idun. Of course they sent out into all parts of the world to seek her, but nowhere could they get tidings of Idun and her apples. At last it came to be rumoured that on the day of her disappearance she had been seen with Loke, and Odin ordered him to be brought in chains before the council of the gods, that he might declare what he knew of the misfortune that had befallen Asgarth. At first he would give no answer; but when they threatened him with death or torture if he did not help them find Idun, he at last confessed what had happened. Then he told them that the eagle was no other than the giant Thiasse.

"But if Freya will only lend me her falcon robe once more, I will myself go to Giant-land and fetch back Idun."

Once more the goddess consented, and Loke flew away from Asgarth in bird guise and turned his flight northward to the land of frost and cold. When he came to the castle of Thiasse, he found the giant absent and Idun alone at home. She was glad enough to see an old friend, and promised to return with Loke if he could bring her in safety to Asgarth. Then Loke, who was a clever magician,



LOKE BEFORE THE GODS.

changed her into a nut, so that he might carry her in his claw, and not be hindered in his flight.

Soon afterwards the giant returned, and, when he missed Idun, he put on his eagle robe and flew off in search of her. It was not long before he spied the falcon, and as his speed was greater than Loke's, it seemed that he must catch him up before he could get back to Asgarth.

Now all the gods were watching eagerly for the return of Idun, and when they saw the falcon coming near, holding something carefully in his claw, and an eagle in close pursuit, they guessed what had happened, and sought a means of stopping the eagle from catching the falcon. In all haste they collected bundles of shavings and piled them on the wall, and the instant the falcon had crossed the boundary, they set fire to the heap. The eagle was flying with such impetus that he could not stop himself, and he flew straight into the flames, which burnt his feathers so that he dropped to the ground, and the gods fell on him and killed him.

When Skade, the giant's daughter, learned what had happened, she clad herself in glittering armour, and went to Asgarth to demand satisfaction for her father's death, for she deemed it a base action to kill a defenceless enemy. Then the Asers agreed that a wrong had been done her, and they bade her choose which of them she would as her husband. But they made the condition that she should only see their feet when she made her choice. Now the feet of one were white and well-shaped, far beyond the rest, and when Skade saw these, she exclaimed—

“Surely this must be Balder, for he is the fairest of all gods. I choose this one as my husband.”

But in reality her choice had fallen on Niord, the god who had charge of the winds. Accordingly he was

wedded to the giant's daughter; but they could not agree about their dwelling-place. Skadi wanted to live in her father's rocky fortress at Thrymheim; but Niord wished to remain in his own home at Noatun on the seashore. At last it was settled that they should divide their time between the two, staying nine nights at a time in each place. Unfortunately this plan did not answer. Niord was not happy in the mountains, for, he said, the howling of the wolves kept him awake all night. As for Skade, she hated the sea, and complained that the swans and gulls made such a noise that she could not get a wink of sleep. So it was settled that they should live apart, and Skade went back to Thrymheim, and Niord remained at Noatun.

THE DEATH OF BALDER.

BALDER, Odin's second son, was the fairest and best-loved of all the gods, and every one wished him well. Now, there came a time when he seemed full of sadness, and when the others questioned him as to his sorrow, he told them that he was troubled by evil dreams which haunted him at night, and filled him with sad foreboding in the day. When Odin heard this, he bade all the gods come together in council to consider what these dreams might forebode, and whether by any care or vigilance they could avert the doom from Balder. But first he went forth himself to seek counsel of coming events from those who could read the future.

Sadly he mounted Sleipner, the swift grey steed, and took the downward road to the land of mist and the abode of Hel. Here at the gates the dog that guarded the

gloomy kingdom rushed out at him with gaping jaws, but the father of gods rode past unmoved, and the earth groaned beneath his horse's hoofs. On and on he rode till he came to the eastern gate, where dwelt the Vala of prophetic spirit. Asleep she lay, and would have slept on for many a year; but Odin knew the songs and charms that must break the deepest slumber. Then she rose up and spoke—

“Who is the man who has forced my steps hither? Snow fell on me, rain drenched me, dew moistened my limbs, for I slept the sleep of death.”

Then Odin answered, “My name is Vegtam, the Wanderer. I know all the secrets of the Upper World. Do you instruct me of the world below. For whom are these couches strewn with rings, and these beds with gold?”

“A goblet and feast are made ready for Balder. Hope has fled from Asgarth. You have forced me to speak; henceforth I keep silence.”

“Be not silent, Vala, for I have more to ask. Name me the man who shall slay Balder and bring death to Odin's heir.”

“Hod shall bring him to the house of Hel, for he shall slay his own brother. You have forced me to speak; henceforth I keep silence.”

“Be not silent, Vala, for I have more to ask. Tell me who shall avenge Balder's death and bring his murderer to punishment.”

“Rind in the west shall bear Odin a son, who, when he is but one night old shall go forth to battle. Unwashed and unkempt he shall go forth in his haste to avenge Balder's death. You have forced me to speak; henceforth I keep silence.”

In vain Odin sought to question her further, for she

would reveal no more. Therefore he mounted Sleipner and rode back to Asgarth, and carried the sad tidings to the Asers. Then Frigg bethought her how she might avert this doom from her best-loved son, and she resolved to go forth and take an oath from every living thing—yes, and from stones and trees and plants, from fire and water, from food and drink—that they would not hurt Balder. At last she was content, and thought he must be safe, since no creature, living or dead, would do him hurt.

All the gods rejoiced when they knew what Frigg had done, and they determined to make trial of Balder, to see whether he was really secure from all harm. They formed themselves into a ring round him, and all in turn struck him a blow or aimed some missile at him. One threw a stone, another shot an arrow, a third hurled the branch of a tree; but all glided harmlessly past him, and Balder received no hurt.

When the gods saw this, their joy was great. Only Loke did not rejoice, for his thoughts were evil, and he was jealous that gods and men and things showed this favour to Balder alone. Therefore he turned all his cunning to consider how he might do him a hurt. Disguised as an old woman, he went to Frigg's palace, Fensal, and told her he had just come from the council of the gods. When Frigg asked what they did there he answered—

“They are all standing in a circle shooting at Balder; but neither weapons, nor blows, nor missiles are able to harm him.”

Then Frigg spoke rejoicing: “I have taken an oath from all things in heaven and earth not to harm Balder.”

“What!” said Loke, “have all things sworn not to hurt Balder? Has everything, great and small, taken that oath?”

44 *GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH*

"All that have power to do harm," answered Frigg. "There is a poor little plant called mistletoe that grows to the east of Valhalla; I deemed this too small and insignificant to do any one a hurt, so I did not linger to take an oath from it. I cannot recall any other creature that I passed by."

When Loke heard this his heart danced with joy. He went to the spot that Frigg had described, and there, sure enough, grew the mistletoe. He plucked it and carried it to the place where the gods were making sport with Balder. Outside the circle stood Hod, the blind god. Loke said to him—

"Why do you not shoot at Balder like the rest?"

"Because I am blind and cannot see him. Besides, I have nothing to throw."

"Here is something for you," said Loke, pressing the mistletoe into his hand, "and I will direct your aim to the place where Balder stands. For it is a shame that you, his own brother, should not do him honour like the rest."

Hod thanked him, and threw the mistletoe as Loke bade him. The aim was a true one; the tender twig pierced Balder's heart, and he fell dead to the ground.

Then all the gods were filled with consternation, and they fell to weeping and wailing for Balder the Beautiful. All sorrowed for him because they loved him; but Odin's grief was the greatest, for he knew that Balder's death was the beginning of evil times that were to come upon Asgarth.

When at last the gods had their fill of weeping they made preparation for Balder's funeral. They fetched his ship Ringhorn, which is the largest of all ships, and they laid his corpse upon it, for they meant to burn it far out at sea. When Nanna, his wife, saw the body



BALDER'S FUNERAL.

carried out, her grief was so great that she dropped down dead. So they took her up and laid her on the pile beside Balder, and they placed upon it his horse with all its trappings. Thor consecrated it with his hammer.

All the gods came to the burning, and many giants and other folk as well. Odin came in a chariot with Frigg, and they were attended by the Valkyries and the two ravens. Frey's car was drawn by his boar Golden-bristle, Heimdall rode on Gulltopper, and Freya was drawn by her cats. On the top of the pyre Odin laid his ring, Draupner, as an offering to the dead.

While they did these last honours to Balder, Hermod, the swiftest of Odin's sons, was riding with all speed to the kingdom of Hel. For Frigg had sent him to see whether by any charm or gift he might ransom Balder and bring him back to Asgarth. At Odin's bidding he mounted Sleipner, the eight-footed steed, and he rode for nine days and nights through deep-lying valleys where light never penetrated, till he came to the river Gioll, which is crossed by a bridge of gold. A maiden named Modgunn kept guard here. She bade him stand, and asked his name and race.

"For," said she, "yesterday five companies of dead men rode across the bridge, and yet it resounded less than under you alone. Nor is your colour like that of the dead. Tell me your errand. Why do you ride downwards to Hel?"

Then Hermod answered, "I am riding to Hel to seek for Balder. Have you seen him on the road?"

"Balder has ridden across the bridge. But you must go northward to reach Hel's domain."

Hermod now turned to the north, and rode on without stopping till he came to Hel's gate. Then he alighted, and strapped Sleipner's girths tighter, and mounting again,

drove his spurs into him, till at last the horse rose in the air and cleared the gate at one bound. Then Hermod dismounted, and entered the hall of Hel; and in the place of honour he espied Balder.

There Hermod met with a kind reception, and he passed the night in the realms of Hel. Next day she herself gave him audience, and he prayed her to let Balder return with him to Asgarth.

"For," he said, "all gods and men are sorrowing for his loss."

Then Hel answered, "I will make trial of your words, and see whether it is true that all men and gods love Balder. If all creatures in the world, living and lifeless, will weep for him, then he shall return to Asgarth; but he shall bide here with me if one single creature refuse to weep."

When she had thus spoken, Hermod arose and went out of the hall. Balder came down from his seat, and attended him to the door. There he bade him farewell, and gave back the ring Draupner into his hands, with a message of greeting to Odin; and Nanna sent a mantle and other gifts to Frigg. Sadly they parted, and sadly Hermod rode forth on his homeward way. At Asgarth all the gods flocked round him to hear his tidings, and he told them of his ride, and his meeting with Balder, and the answer given by Hel.

Then the gods sent messengers into all the world, bidding every creature weep for Balder. All shed tears for the fair god, men and beasts, earth, stones, and plants; not one refused to weep for Balder. When they had gone through earth and sky and water, they thought their task was done. But on the way back they saw an old woman of giant form sitting alone in a cave. When they bade her weep like the rest, that Balder might escape from the power of Hel, she answered—

"Never a tear will Thock weep for the death of Balder. Dry are mine eyes, and dry will they remain. Neither in life nor death did Balder show me a kindness. Let Hel keep her own."

This was the only living creature who refused to weep, and some say the old woman was Loke himself in disguise, since it was through him that Balder had met his death, and he would not permit his return to life. But, because one creature refused to weep, Hel would not let Balder go; and he remained among the dead till the twilight of the gods was past, and the last great battle ended. Then he returned once more to Asgarth, and reigned with the new race of gods in endless joy and felicity.

THE BINDING OF LOKE.

It was Loke who had brought about Balder's death and hindered his return to life. This was the worst of all his actions, though he had done the gods many another bad turn. He had enticed away Idun with her apples; he would have carried off Freya to be a giant's bride; he had himself wedded a giantess, and he was father of the wolf whom the gods regarded as their most deadly foe. Yet, because he had once been sworn brother to Odin, the gods had tolerated him in their midst. But the death of Balder was a wrong they could not forgive. And once, when Aeger was entertaining the gods, Loke killed one of the attendants; and though they ordered him out of the hall, he forced his way in, and with taunting speeches insulted all the gods and goddesses present. At last they could put up with him no longer, and resolved to punish him for his wickedness.

Loke, having got wind of their intentions, fled to the mountains. There he built himself a house with four doors, so that he might look out in all directions, and see if any one was approaching. And if there seemed to be danger, he would change himself into some other shape. Sometimes he turned himself into a salmon, and hid in a waterfall, and he used to amuse himself by wondering what kind of trap the Asers would make to catch him in. Once he thought it would be fun to make one himself, just to see whether he was more cunning than his enemies. He took a quantity of linen thread, and twisted it into loops, just as we make nets. This, he thought, would make an excellent trap for a fish. For in those days men fished only with a line and hook. While he was busily engaged with his net-making, he suddenly looked up, and saw that some of the gods were close to the house, and would be upon him in a minute. With all haste he threw the net into the fire, put on his salmon-shape, and jumped into the waterfall. But his enemies had spied him, and they now knew where he was, and in what shape. Before they tried to catch him, they went into the house, and looked all about them. There they found the net, which was only half burnt, and wondered what it was used for. Then some one suggested that it was an instrument for catching fish. They set to work, therefore, and made another exactly like it: and when it was finished they took it to the river. Thor held one end of the net, and his companions the other, and they threw it into the water. Loke slipped between two stones, and lay hidden there while the net passed over his body. The gods noticed something alive among the rocks, and cast their net again, this time with a heavy weight attached to it. Then Loke darted out from among the stones, and swam in front of the net, but as he was close to the sea, and did not

want to get into it, he leapt across the net, and back into the waterfall. Now his pursuers had seen him, and knew just where to find him. They broke up into two parties, and waited on either side of the river, while Thor waded along in mid-stream. In this way they drove Loke once more towards the sea, and he had again to choose between entering it at the risk of his life, or leaping across into the waterfall. And for the second time he tried the jump, but Thor caught him in mid-air. The slippery fish nearly glided out of his hand, but Thor grasped it firmly by the tail; and that is why all salmon have pointed tails.

Now Loke was in the power of his enemies, and they were resolved to show him no mercy, and to root out his children as well as himself. With the bowels of his own son they bound Loke to three sharp pieces of rock. One they put under his shoulders, one under his loins, and the third under his knees. And the bonds grew hard as iron. Skade, the giant's daughter, took a snake, and fastened it above him, that the venom might drip into his face. But Sigyn, Loke's wife, took her stand beside him, and caught the poison drops in a bowl. When this was full, she stepped aside to empty it, and then some drops fell on Loke, and when he felt their sting, he struggled so violently to get loose that the earth trembled, and men called it an earthquake. There he lay in iron bonds till the twilight of the gods.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS.

Now at last the ruin which had been foretold was at hand, and even the power of Odin could not avert the coming doom. Sin and sorrow had entered into heaven.

Balder had been slain by his own brother; Loke had turned traitor to the other Asers; and they in turn had caught and bound him by treachery. Asgarth was no longer the home of innocence. Along with sin old age had entered in. No longer might Idun dwell among the gods and renew their youth with her magic apples. Full of sad foreboding, she lay bound in the depths below; and when youth and innocence were gone the gods were no longer a match for their foes.

On earth, too, there were portents of the coming change. For three years Midgarth was desolated with war. Men grew covetous and greedy of gold; brother spared not his brother's life, nor the son his father's. Love and honour were gone out of the world, and every man sought only his own good. Then there came three terrible winters, when the snow fell without ceasing, and bitter winds blew on every side. There was neither spring nor summer, for the sun had lost all its power, and soon there was no more sun.

Before the Fenrir's-wolf had been bound by the gods, a giantess bore him twin cubs, Hate and Skoll, and these the Asers had neglected to bind. When they grew up their sport was to chase the sun and moon in their course through the sky. Sometimes they got near enough to set their teeth in their prey; then part of the circle disappeared, and there was an eclipse of sun or moon. At these times people used to shout aloud, and strike on instruments, and make all the noise they could, so as to frighten the wolves, and force them to let go their prey. And after a while the sun's light would come out once more. But now the wolves had grown strong and fat, battenning on the flesh of men fallen in unholy fight, and they were able to seize and hold their prey. Then the sun was swallowed by Skoll, and the moon by Hate. The

stars, too, fell from the sky, and there was darkness by night and day. Then the earth began to tremble; the mountains were shaken, and the trees uprooted. The chains that bound all vile things were loosened; and Loke and the Wolf were free once more. These were the days when the powers of evil held sway. The Midgarth snake, which Thor had wounded and frightened, now gathered fresh strength and struck out for the land, carrying with it huge waves that flooded towns and fields.

In this universal ruin the enemies of Asgarth gathered and joined forces. From the north the great Frost-giant, Hrym, came in the ship Nailferry. This ship was made out of the nails of dead men that had been left uncut. For mankind had grown careless and impious, and neglected the last rites to the departed; else it had not been possible to build from such material a vessel large enough to hold Hrym and his hosts. Another ship came from the east with Loke at the helm. In it were the powers of Hel and darkness. From the south came Muspel, the fire demon, and Surt, the swarthy, with the hosts of the flame giants. These three great armies came to storm the citadel of Asgarth, and in front of all the hosts fought the Wolf and the Snake. Then what had been prophesied of old was accomplished, for the bridge Bifrost broke down under the weight of the assailants, and they forded great streams, and strode over lofty mountains, till they came to Asgarth and the citadel of the gods.

Heimdall, the watchman, had espied them from afar, and he wound his Gjallar-horn, and blew on it a blast that spread terror to the furthest corners of Asgarth. When the Asers heard it they girt on their armour in haste, and prepared for the last fight. On a sudden the five hundred and forty doors of Valhalla sprang open, and the warriors

poured forth in battle array, to fight for Odin and the powers of heaven. At their head rode Odin himself, in glittering armour, with a helmet of gold on his head, and in his hand he brandished his magic spear Gungner. By his side marched Thor on foot, and he carried Mjolner, the last hope of the Asers.

The battle was fought on the great plain of Vigrid, which extends a hundred miles every way. Never was there such a clash of arms, and all creation quaked and groaned at the shock. First of all the Wolf, who had so long cherished his vengeance against the gods, sought out Odin himself, and attacked him with gaping jaws and fire-breathing nostrils. And Odin's ancient power was gone, so that the Wolf was victor, and the father of gods fell his prey.

Meantime Thor was fighting the Midgarth snake, and he was happier than Odin, for he conquered and slew his enemy. But this was his last victory. The poison which the monster had breathed into his face had done its deadly work, and he fell to the earth, nine paces from his conquered foe.

Many another doughty deed was done on the plain of Vigrid. Surt, the flame giant, set on Frey, and neither the fleetness of his boar nor his magic ship could avail to save him now. Only his own good sword could have helped him, and that he had bartered long ago for the sake of his fair bride Gerda. So Surt came off victorious after a hard fight. Tyr, too, must have missed the hand he pledged to the Wolf, when Garm, the hound of hell, burst his chains and came against him with fierce onset. Yet with his one hand he fought an even fight. Each dealt the other a fatal blow, so that both lay dead on the field. And a like fate befell Heimdall and Loke.

Thus all the mightiest of the gods had fallen on the plain

of Vigrid, yet the battle was not at an end, nor the victory certain. The Snake and the hell-hound were slain, but the worst of all monsters, the Wolf, still led the hosts. Then Vidar, Odin's youngest son, challenged him to battle; and as he opened his terrible mouth, Vidar set his foot on the Wolf's lower jaw. On this foot was a shoe made of the strips of leather which men pare off other shoes to shape the toes and heels. Therefore all men should throw these strips away, because thus they help to strengthen the foot which holds the powers of evil in check. Vidar held down the Wolf with his foot, and with his mighty hands he dragged back its upper jaw, so that the head was split in two. This is how the Wolf met his death.

Of all the hosts that fought on both sides but few now remained. Earth and sky were burnt up in the flames scattered by Surt; men and dwarfs and elves and all other living creatures perished in this mighty conflagration; and there was neither Asgarth, nor Midgarth, nor sea, nor sky—nothing but universal ruin.

THE NEW LIGHT OF DAY.

THUS perished Asgarth and the ancient gods in expiation for sin. But a new heaven and a new earth sprang from the ruins. The earth rose up again from the sea, fresh and green, and corn grew on it unsown. There was a new sun, that had been a child of the old one, and its light was fairer than before. Moon and stars came back to the heavens, and earth and sky were full of beauty once more. Nor was it long before there were mortals to dwell there. One man and one woman had escaped the

general ruin, hidden away among the branches of Learad, and from them sprang the new race of mankind, fairer and more virtuous than the old.

In the halls of the new Asgarth the younger gods held sway. Vidar, Odin's avenger, had come unhurt out of the fight, and so had Mode and Magne, Thor's sons, who henceforth wielded their father's hammer in turn. From the realms of the dead came Hod and Balder, the slayer and the slain, and with them was Vale, who slew Hod to avenge Balder's death. Thus the golden age returned to Asgarth; and the golden balls, with which the gods had played in the days of their youth and innocence, were found hidden among the grass and made sport for them once more. New palaces sprang up, in which fallen warriors feasted as of yore, and all was gladness, joy, and harmony.

But of these new gods there are no tales to tell. For in truth it was not the monsters and giants that overthrew the deities of the olden time. One mightier than all the gods of Asgarth had arisen and ruled henceforth in heaven and earth. A newer, purer creed cast the religion of our forefathers into the shade; and it was the light of Christianity shed over all the Germanic lands that banished into everlasting twilight the gods and heroes of Asgarth.

PART II.

STORIES OF THE HEROES.

I. THE STORY OF SIGMUND.

THE WRONG.

ONCE upon a time, in the days when the old gods still ruled the world, a king named Volsung reigned in Hunland. He was the strongest and bravest of living men, and his palace was a great and wonderful building, all decorated with gold and silver. The most wonderful thing in it was the great hall, built by Volsung himself. In the centre stood a tall oak-tree, so high that its trunk pierced the roof, and its branches spread out far and wide to all the winds of heaven. This tree was called the Branstock, which means the Children's Tree. The king's wife was a Valkyrie, and they had eleven children, ten sons and one daughter, Signy. She grew up to be tall and strong and beautiful, and of all his children the twin pair, Sigmund and Signy, were dearest to their father.

When the princess was old enough to marry, many princes from other lands sought her hand. The richest and most powerful of these was Siggeir, King of the Gauts in Sweden. Volsung, who favoured his suit, asked Signy whether she was willing to marry Siggeir. But she made a sad answer.

"Yes, father, if it is your pleasure, I will be Siggeir's wife and the mother of his children. But my heart mis-gives me, and I know that sorrow will come of this mating."

For Signy was the wisest as well as the fairest of maids, and could read the future.

Volsung now sent word to Siggeir that he might come and wed Signy, and great preparations were made for the wedding. At the appointed time the royal bridegroom arrived with a retinue of earls and warriors, bringing splendid gifts for the bride. Volsung gave them a fitting welcome, and day after day Gauts and Huns feasted together in the hall. On the wedding day a great banquet was prepared there, and the tables were ranged all round the Branstock. There hosts and guests sat side by side, and the long hours passed swiftly away with feasting and drinking and tales and song. Many a merry jest passed from mouth to mouth, and the hall of Volsung had never witnessed a day of greater gladness.

When the mirth and fun were at their highest, the door suddenly opened and a stranger stood in the hall. He was taller than any man there, he wore a grey cloak and a slouch hat pressed down on his forehead; in one hand he carried a sword and in the other a bill-hook. All gazed in wonder at the new-comer, and men's hearts whispered to them that this was no other than the great wayfarer Odin. Without uttering a word the stranger stepped up to the oak, drew the sword from its scabbard, and drove it into the bole of the tree. Then he broke silence.

"Who draws this sword from its place shall keep it as a gift from me, and shall learn that he holds the best blade in the whole world in trust."

Thus he spoke and vanished, and for a while a great

awe fell on the revellers, for something told them that Odin himself had been among them.

Volsung was the first to recover speech. "Come," he said, "ye earls of the Huns and Gauts, let us see which of us is destined by Allfather to wield this wondrous blade."

With this he stepped up to the tree, and grasped the hilt of the sword; but though he tugged at it with all his might it would not budge an inch. So he went back to his place well content, for his mighty deeds were done already, and his glory belonged to the past; but he hoped to see his sons do great deeds in the days yet to come.

Next Siggeir tried, but his luck was no better; and he went back full of wrath, for he was young and ambitious still, and desired to win fame and glory in the sight of his fair bride. Now the earls tried, each in his turn, and after them the princes, but no one was strong enough to move the sword. At last it came to Sigmund's turn to try his luck. Scarcely had he put his hand to the hilt when the sword came away of its own accord, and he brandished it in the air, while all the company cheered and shouted. By this token they knew that the gods had marked Sigmund out to be one of the heroes of earth.

Every one was rejoiced at Sigmund's success, for he was a general favourite. Only Siggeir grudged him his good fortune, for he was jealous and angry that another man should be chosen for a higher lot than his own. He was resolved that he would win this sword for himself by fair means or foul, and tried to persuade Sigmund to give it up to him. First he offered him a large sum of gold if he would sell it, but Sigmund laughed him to scorn.

"Surely the sword would have come to you of its



SIGMUND.

own accord," said he, "if Odin had meant you to wield it."

This answer enraged Siggeir still further, and from that moment he began to plot against Sigmund, thinking how he might contrive to destroy him and all his kin. But at the time he concealed his anger, and spoke fair words to Volsung.

"Alas!" he said, "I must leave your hospitable roof to-morrow, and return to my own country, for a kingdom has need of its king. But when three months have gone by I bid you, Volsung, and your sons and earls, to my land. There I will feast you right royally, as befits the kindred of my fair bride and queen."

Volsung promised to come, and thanked Siggeir warmly. But Signy was sad at heart; in secret she sought out her father, and besought him not to cross the sea at Siggeir's bidding.

"For my heart misgives me that he plots your undoing."

But Volsung answered, "I have given my word, which a king cannot break. Come what may, the Volsungs must fare to Gautland."

Then they parted full of sorrow, and Signy sailed away with her husband to her new home.

When the appointed time was come, Volsung and his sons set out for Siggeir's kingdom. They took with them a goodly retinue of earls and followers, enough to maintain their state in the halls of a king, but too few to hold their own against an enemy's hosts. It was evening when their ships drew near the land, and under cover of the darkness Signy stole down to the shore to greet them.

"Alas! father," said she, "would you had listened to my warning, for Siggeir has bidden you hither with evil intent. His soldiers are lying in wait to fall upon you;

for he owes you a grudge, and means to destroy our house, root and branch, because he is jealous of Sigmund's coming glory. But even now it is not too late. Turn your ship's keel and sail back home while yet you may."

But Volsung answered as before, "I have given my word, which a king cannot break. If Siggeir is a perjured host, shall a Volsung turn coward?"

Then Signy bade them farewell, and went back to the palace.

Next morning Volsung and his followers went on land, and mustered such preparation as they could for battle. And, sure enough, Siggeir was awaiting them with a great army; but, in spite of his numbers, the fight was a long and obstinate one. Nine times the Volsungs broke through the enemy's line and dealt destruction all round them. The tenth time the king fell in front of his troops, and his warriors fell all about him. Even then his sons stood their ground, and fought on to the last. When all the rest were slain, they were taken alive, and led in chains before Siggeir. He had been too great a coward to take part in the fighting, and only summoned up courage to see the princes when they were bound hand and foot and could do him no hurt. He at once gave orders that they should be put to death, but Signy begged for their lives.

"Sigmund's sword is yours now," said she; "what more do you seek? My brothers are taken prisoner, and can do you no harm. Let them live at least, for life is sweet as long as the eye may behold the light."

Siggeir answered, "You ask a strange boon. Surely, for a brave warrior, death is sweeter than captivity. But be it as you will."

Thereupon he gave orders that the Hunnish princes should be taken into the depths of a wood, and made fast

with chains to the trunk of the stoniest tree in the forest. He bade men keep strict watch over Signy, that she might not slip away unseen and bring succour to her brothers.

So this poor queen was forced to stay in the palace, though her heart was in the forest with her brothers. Every day tidings of the captives were brought to the king, and very terrible they were, for the beasts of the forest had come to devour the princes. Each night two had fallen victims, and their bones lay rotting in the chains. At this the king rejoiced; but the queen wept without ceasing, and night and day she considered how she might contrive a means of escape for those that yet lived.

At last came the day when the worst news of all reached the palace. Sigmund had lived the longest, but he too was gone. Siggeir might rest content now, for there was no man living who could challenge his right to Odin's sword, and he was too foolish to understand that it could do no service to one who had won it by treachery and not as the god's free gift. As for Signy, despair seized on her at last. In vain had she begged for her brothers' lives; they were dead all the same, and their sufferings had been the greater. Now no one cared to watch her, and she could go out to the wood to weep as much as she pleased. Therefore she hastened to the spot where her brothers had been tethered, and, to her surprise, she saw a man digging a grave. When she drew nearer, she recognized Sigmund.

"Sigmund," she cried in joy, "are you yet alive, or is it a ghost that mocks my sight?"

"It is I, indeed, your unhappy brother. But oh, my sister, why did you fail us in our terrible need? And why do you come now that all is over?"

Then Signy told him of the close watch kept on her,

and Sigmund related the grim tale of their sufferings. At last, in rage and despair, he had become as one of the beasts of the forest ; and when the wolf that devoured his brothers thrust its cruel muzzle into his face, he had seized it with his teeth, and held it fast with a strong grip, and putting forth all his strength, had burst the chains that held him. With the broken bits he had killed the beast, and now he was once more a free man.

"And my first duty is to bury the dead. You, Signy, must help me with this, and do the last honour to those whom you failed to help while yet they lived."

Signy did his bidding, and the two worked side by side, and spoke never a word till the bones of the Volsung princes were laid in alien earth.

When this task was ended she went back to the palace, and Sigmund remained alone in the forest. Signy sent him food and clothes, but he soon learned to supply his own wants ; for his hand was against every man's, since all in that land were his enemies, and he murdered travellers without remorse, and broke into men's houses and plundered their goods, and lived the life of an outlaw. He found shelter in an old deserted cave, and here he lived alone for many years, nursing hate and vengeance in his heart.

Nor was it only in the forest that the hope of vengeance was cherished. When she sat on the throne by the king's side, or feasted with him at table, Signy contrived to conceal her hate ; but in her heart there was only one desire—to see her husband perish as miserably as her brothers had done. All her thoughts were of plots to help Sigmund, but many years were to go by before her hopes were fulfilled.

THE VENGEANCE.

ONE day, as Sigmund lay resting before his cave, he saw one of the Court ladies coming towards him. With her was a boy of about ten. She stepped up to Sigmund, and said—

“Queen Signy sends you this boy, and bids you keep him safely, and train him up to be your helper in time of need.”

Sigmund guessed that this must be Signy's son; and as he knew that she must have some hidden purpose for what she did, he agreed to do as she asked. So the boy stayed with Sigmund, and he learnt to shoot and ride and snare the birds. But when Sigmund went hunting, he left him at home to tend the house and cook the food. One day, when he was going out as usual, he told the boy to bake bread for dinner.

“I shall bring home the meat, so you must bake the bread.”

But when the boy took the meal from the cask, he felt something stir inside it, and it was a deadly adder. At the sight he began to tremble and cry, and he durst not knead the meal. When Sigmund came home and asked for bread, the boy told him what had happened. Then Sigmund knew that this was no helper for him, so he sent him home to his mother, and remained in the forest alone.

Another year went by, and again a boy came to the cave. He, too, showed fear like his brother, and Sigmund sent him home.

“I will live and die alone,” he said, “for no child of a perjured king can help me in my need.”

But Signy was still considering how she might raise

up a helper for her brother, and it happened that one day a witch came to the palace and told many strange tales; she knew powerful charms and spells which enabled her to change shapes with any other woman at will. Then Signy said—

“Change shapes with me, I pray you, for a few days only, and I will reward you richly with gold and treasure.”

The witch readily consented, and the two changed shapes. The witch stayed in the palace in the guise of Signy, and sat beside the king on the throne and at the board. Meantime the queen, in her changed form, stole once more to the forest, and sought the cave of Sigmund. She spoke fair words to him, and won his love with her smiles and caresses, and for a while she stayed there in the cave. Then she stole away from the forest and went back to the palace, and took her own shape again.

Another ten years went by, and for the third time a boy came to Sigmund and asked him for protection and shelter. He never guessed that this was his own son, but somehow his heart went out to him, for those bright, clear eyes and sturdy limbs recalled the noble Volsung race. So, in spite of his resolve, he took him in, and taught and trained him. Sinfiotle, as the boy was called, learnt easily and gladly, and he grew to love his foster-father as his own. Then the time came to put him to the test. As before, Sigmund went out hunting, and left meal for the boy to knead; and, as before, there was an adder in the cask. But the boy only laughed, because the meal seemed alive, and kneaded the harder. When Sigmund returned, the bread was ready, and the adder was worked up in it. Sigmund asked for the bread, and Sinfiotle pulled it out of the oven.

“Here it is,” said he, “creepy thing and all; for I

could not let you bring home the meat and find no bread to eat with it."

Then Sigmund's heart laughed within him, and he knew that at last the appointed helper had come; but he forbade the boy to eat the bread. For himself, he was so made that no poison could hurt him.

After this Sigmund took the boy with him wherever he went, and the two became inseparable. One day, when they were on one of their expeditions in search of booty, they came to a house whose door stood open. Inside it lay two men fast asleep, and above their heads hung two wolf-robcs. Sigmund understood that these men were bewitched, for it happened sometimes that an evil spell was laid on men and turned them into beasts; but from time to time they were allowed to put off the beast shape for a while. And often they could be released by some more powerful spell. Now Sigmund hated the gods for the great wrong that had been done him, and when he saw the wolf-shapes he said—

"Let us put on these wolf-robcs and become as the beasts of the forest, for the wolf is the enemy of the gods, and so are we."

They now put on the wolf-robcs, and for the nine days they wore them they were no better than beasts. Not till the tenth day could they get back their own shape. But while they went about in wolf-guise they were stronger even than before, and their hatred of mankind was greater, and they cared for nothing but killing and slaying.

"Let us range the forest apart," said Sigmund, "and kill every one we meet. I think each of us is strong enough to tackle seven men unaided. But if you fall in with more than seven, call me, and I will answer your howls."

So each went his way, and long afterwards tales were told of those grim wolves that roamed the forest, larger and fiercer than any seen before or since. Once while they were in this state, Sinfiotle came upon a party of eleven men, and so great was his strength that he was able to attack and kill them all unaided. When Sigmund heard of it, he said—

“Why did you not call me?”

“What?” answered Sinfiotle. “Surely I should be a puny sort of wolf if I could not tackle eleven men unaided.”

Then Sigmund flew into a rage, for he was jealous of the boy's strength, and the beast nature had entered his soul as well as his body. He flew at Sinfiotle and bit him in the throat, so that he fell down dead. Then the man's mind came back to him, and he mourned for the dead boy, and took him up and carried him back to the house where they had found the wolf-shapes. But the sleeping men were no longer there. So he sat down by the dead body, making moan in wolfish fashion. When he looked up, he noticed two weasels in the forest fighting, and one bit the other in the throat and killed it. Then the living one ran off to the forest, and came back with a herb and laid it on the wound. The dead weasel sprang up at once and came back to life. Just then a raven flew that way with a like herb in its beak, which dropped at Sigmund's feet. He picked it up and laid it on Sinfiotle's neck. Then he too was cured, and sprang up alive and well. Sigmund now prayed to the gods to take away the wolfish nature; but they had to wait till the nine days were ended. On the tenth they regained their human shapes, and they burned the wolf-ropes so that no other men might be cursed by them.

Now at last the time was drawing near for which

Sigmund had longed and waited and Sinfiotle had been reared. With his help it might be possible to kill King Siggeir. The two outlaws made their way unseen to the palace, and contrived to slip in when no one was at hand to stop them. They got as far as the vestibule of the great hall, and here they saw a quantity of ale casks, which were kept there in readiness for a feast. They managed to conceal themselves behind these, intending to wait there till nightfall, when they hoped to slip out unseen and kill Siggeir in his sleep. It happened, however, that the two youngest princes were playing in the hall with their golden hoops, and one of these rolled away and was lost among the casks. In looking for it, the children caught sight of the men, and ran crying to their father to tell him what they had seen. Signy, who knew of the plot, was very angry that the conspirators had been discovered, and she cried out in a loud voice—

“They have betrayed you; let their lives pay the forfeit!”

Sigmund would not hurt them, but Sinfiotle had a harder heart; for it was as an avenger he had been brought into the world, and pity was left out of his nature. He seized the boys in his strong arms, and snapped their bones in two and threw the lifeless limbs before the feet of the king. He shouted to his attendants to seize and bind the strangers; but the order was more easily given than obeyed. Sigmund and Sinfiotle made a stubborn resistance, and killed several of the guards before they were taken and put in chains. Then the king considered how he might put them to death with the greatest suffering. And at last he hit on a plan.

Next morning a great mound was erected of earth and stones piled up, such as was used for the graves of great men. Inside was a hollow place, divided by a rock into

two parts, and here the murderers were buried alive. Each was to starve to death in his own cell, hearing the groans of his companion, and yet unable to see or succour him. While the mound was being roofed in, Signy managed to come unobserved and throw what looked like a bundle of straw into Sinfjotle's cell. Then the place was covered in, and the victims were left to their fate.

Sinfjotle now undid his parcel, and found inside a piece of bacon. In it something hard and pointed was stuck. He pulled it out and found a sword—no other, in fact, than the famous blade of Odin, which had been the beginning of all Sigmund's troubles. Now it seemed that it was about to end them. Encouraged by this omen of hope, Sinfjotle pushed the blade into the rock, and it pierced the hard mass quite easily, and passed through to the other side. Here Sigmund caught hold of it; and now they drew it to and fro like a saw, and when they had cut through the barrier between them, they set to work on the wall of the mound. The sword went through everything with the greatest ease, and before long they found themselves outside in the open once more. Now there was no time to be lost, if the work of vengeance was to be done before their escape was discovered. In all haste they made their way back to the palace, and arrived there in the middle of the night. Siggeir was sleeping soundly, like a man who has no enemy to fear. The guards slept too, for they were weary after the events of the day, and no one thought there was anything more to dread. Sigmund and Sinfjotle slipped in unseen, and with the wood and straw that had been piled up in readiness for the winter, they set fire to the great hall. The fumes of the smoke awakened the king, and when he saw the flames he called out—

"Who has done this deed?"

"Sigmund and Sinfiotle have done it. We have come to show you that some of the Volsung race are yet alive."

Thus speaking, they took their stand one on each side of the hall, and with drawn swords stopped all who tried to escape from it. Only Signy would have been allowed to pass, and they called to her to come and save herself before it was too late. Then she came out and stood before Sigmund and said—

"Now you shall learn how I have always befriended you, and that the hope of vengeance has been with me night and day. Sinfiotle is our son—mine and yours. I bore him and you reared him to avenge our kin on Siggeir. But now I go to die with him, for, friend or foe, he is my husband and lord, and it is right that I should perish by his side."

With these words she leapt into the flames. Thus perished Siggeir and Signy and all their household, and their great vengeance was accomplished.

THE DEATH OF SIGMUND.

AFTER these events had befallen, Sigmund went back to his own land, and took Sinfiotle with him. He ruled there over his father's kingdom, and once more good luck seemed to have returned to the Volsung house. The Branstock put forth fresh branches, and the voice and laughter of children was heard in the ancient walls; for Sigmund took to wife a young princess named Borghild, and she bore him two sons, Hamond and Helge. Helge grew up to be a brave and noble prince, who led his father's hosts to battle, and often fought side by side with

his elder brother Sinfiotle. The story of Helge will be told later on.

On one of their expeditions they came to the land of the Varns, and when Sinfiotle saw Swintha, their queen, he thought her so beautiful that he asked her to be his wife. It happened that Gunnar, Borghild's brother, loved the same lady, and this led to a quarrel between the princes. Words led to blows, and at last they agreed to decide the quarrel by combat. In the fight Gunnar was killed, and Sinfiotle was so grieved at having slain the queen's brother that he did not care to return home, but went with his army to distant lands, and fought many a battle and won many a victory, and at last returned home with a rich store of plunder and renown.

The king and queen greeted him joyfully, and bade him welcome in Hunland. But when Borghild asked for news of her brother, Sinfiotle told her the truth—how they had quarrelled and fought and how Gunnar had been worsted and fallen in combat. At this Borghild was filled with grief and anger, but she tried to dissemble her wrath, and pretended to forgive Sinfiotle. She even asked the king to give a feast in his honour, and there she pledged him in a cup of wine in token of friendship. Sinfiotle guessed that there was poison in the cup, and refused to drink it. Sigmund himself then took it from his hands and drained the contents; for poisoned wine could no more hurt him than the adder's venom. Borghild, who noticed what had happened, brought him a second cup, and again Sigmund drank it. When the queen saw this she grew angry, and began to taunt Sinfiotle with bitter words.

"I have buried my hatred," she said, "but you cling to yours. Surely you are not afraid—you of whose prowess men tell such wondrous tales."

72 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

Then Sinfiotle looked at Sigmund as though to ask what he should do, and he whispered—

“Make a pretence of drinking, but let it drop through your beard.”

But Sinfiotle laughed and said, “What must be must,” and he drank and fell dead to the ground.

This was the end of Sinfiotle and his strange, wild life of toil and adventure. Sigmund uttered a cry when he saw him fall, and he mourned with bitter sorrow for his first-born son, who had stood by him in his exile and shared his vengeance. He thought of the old days when they kept house in the cave or joined in the hunt together, of the wild wolf-life and the mound of death, out of which Sinfiotle’s sword had hewn its way. Then bitter sorrow overcame him, and he took the corpse in his arms and carried it for many a long mile, seeking a fitting resting-place for the warrior’s last sleep. At last he came to the mouth of a great river, and while he stood gazing at the waters and wondering how he might cross them, a boat with a dark sail came into sight. In it was an old man with only one eye, clad in a dark grey cloak, who offered to row Sigmund across. But when the corpse was laid in the boat it vanished from sight. Then Sigmund knew that the ferryman was Odin, who had brought him the sword, and was fetching home the warrior after long days of toil and sorrow.

Sigmund now returned home, but he could not forgive Borghild for the murder of his best-loved son. He could no longer bear to see her face, but sent her out of the kingdom, and sought another wife in her place. Word was brought to him of Hiordis, daughter of Eylime, king of the isles, who was fairer and wiser than any other woman. He determined, therefore, to ask her hand in marriage, and sent messengers with gifts to Eylime to

ask for his daughter's hand. It happened that on the very day when his messengers landed, the earls of King Lynge, son of Hunding, had come on the same errand. Eyline did not know how to decide between the suitors, for Lynge was young and a near neighbour, and might be a dangerous enemy, if not a very strong friend; while Sigmund, though old in years, was still the bravest of men, and the tale of the Volsung race was a tale of glory. The king therefore went to his daughter, and bade her decide between them. Without hesitating, she replied—

"I will marry King Sigmund, my father, for I know that his son will be the greatest and noblest hero that ever trod the earth. And I would fain be mother to that warrior."

"Be it so," answered her father; but in his heart he dreaded the wrath of Lynge.

When Sigmund's messengers returned with a favourable answer, the king rejoiced, and made all ready for his wedding journey. He found Hiordis even fairer and wiser than report had told him; and she loved Sigmund for his great name and his past glory. The wedding was celebrated with great festivities, and the feasting and rejoicing continued for two whole months. At the end of that time Sigmund sailed away with his new queen, and Eyline accompanied them home.

Not long after their return heralds came from Lynge to declare war against Sigmund. He had got ready a great army and fleet, and Sigmund scarcely had time to gather a small army to lead against him. Something seemed to warn him that this would be his last battle, and that victory was no longer his. Therefore he resolved to leave Hiordis in a safe place, and chose a spot in the depths of a forest, where she was to remain with her handmaidens to await the result. Else, he feared that,

74 GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH

if Lyngre were victorious, the queen and her treasure would fall into his hands.

Lyngre's army was by far the greater, and it was but a small host that Sigmund could lead against him. But in it was one man with the valour of a thousand. That was Sigmund himself. Grey-haired and old as he was, he stood in the forefront of the battle, and his enemies fell before him as the grass falls before the mower's scythe. Weary and wounded, still he fought on, and no man could stand against him, till at last a strange warrior challenged him to battle. He wore a slouch hat and dark grey mantle; one eye was missing, and in his hand he held a bill-hook. This he hurled at Sigmund, who struck at it with his sword, and the faithless blade snapped in two. The man vanished, and Sigmund stood swordless in front of the battle, and knew that Allfather himself had taken back the gift he once gave. Then he was struck to the ground, and men deemed him dead.

When the battle was over Lyngre went to the palace to seek for Hiordis, but he could find her nowhere. He took possession of the treasure which he found there, but all that was most precious was in the forest in the hiding-place of the queen.

When she heard how the battle had gone, she went to the battlefield to seek her lord, and she found him there, wounded and dying. She staunched his wound and whispered words of hope in his ear, but he answered sadly—

"Nay, Hiordis, perchance my wound might be cured, but I have no wish to live. Victory has forsaken me, and the sword which Odin gave me he himself has broken. The gods have taken from me all hope and joy in life."

"Yet live to avenge my father," she begged.

"That honour is destined for another; for you, Hiordis,

shall bear a son whose fame will be greater than mine, and in the days to come he shall wield my old sword. Take the broken shards, and guard them as your chiefest treasure. One day they will be reforged into a sword to avenge my wrongs and yours. Be content with this hope, and bid me a last farewell, for I go to join my kin in the halls of Odin."

II. THE STORY OF SIGURD.

THE REARING OF SIGURD.

SIGMUND lay dead on the battlefield, and Hiordis mourned beside him. Hour by hour she sat by her dead lord, and never turned her eyes from his face. When at last she looked up and out to sea, she noticed a strange ship making for the land. Uncertain whether it brought friends or foes, she called the faithful handmaid who had been with her in the forest, and said—

"Change clothes with me, I pray, and pretend that you are the queen, and I your handmaid. For my heart is heavy with grief for my dead lord, and I cannot receive strangers in royal fashion."

So the two changed clothes; the maid put on the queen's purple robe, and Hiordis the simple garb of a serving woman.

In the ship which had just come to land was Alf, son of King Hialprek of Denmark. They had put in to get water, but they found the coast deserted, and everywhere traces of a bloody battle. Alf therefore sent his messengers to explore inland, and they came to the forest where the

queen and her maid were in hiding. When their prince heard about the two women whom they had found in the wood, he sent men to fetch them to the ship. And when he questioned them, the maid told him that she was Hiordis, the queen, that her husband, King Sigmund, had been slain in battle, and she had been concealed with her maid in the forest, and thus escaped with the greater part of her treasure. Alf, who pitied their misfortunes, asked whether they would accompany him to Denmark, and offered them a home at his father's court. They consented gladly, and Alf took them on board his ship. The treasure was given into his keeping, but the broken shards of Sigmund's sword Hiordis guarded herself.

In Denmark the two women found a hospitable welcome, for the Danish queen pitied their sad fate, and did her best to cheer and comfort them. She soon guessed their secret, and advised Alf to put questions to them, which would show whether her suspicions were correct. One day when he was chatting with them he said to the pretended queen—

“When you lived at home in the old days what means had you for telling the time, and how did you know that dawn was at hand on dark nights when there was no star in the heavens?”

Then she answered, “It was our custom at home to drink a cup of mead at daybreak, and I got in the habit of waking up at that time.”

Alf smiled, and said, “That was a strange habit for a princess.”

Then he asked the same question of Hiordis. And she answered—

“My father gave me a golden ring, which always grew cold in the morning at daybreak, and the chill feeling on my finger used to wake me.”

"There must have been gold enough and to spare where the maids wore it," said Alf, laughing. "Come now, do you not think you have played the maid's part long enough? Take back the queen's once more. You are the fairest woman on earth, and I ask you to be my wife, and one day to share the throne with me."

Hiordis thanked him for all his kindness, and consented to be his wife when the time of her mourning for Sigmund was ended.

Months went by, and the time came for Hiordis' child to be born. It was a son, as Sigmund had foretold, and King Hialprek chose his name, Sigurd, the lord of victory. There were great rejoicings throughout the land, for all the people had learnt to love Hiordis. She now consented to marry Alf, and the wedding was celebrated with all manner of festivities.

Sigurd was a beautiful boy, with bright, flashing eyes that showed the warrior's fire, and while he yet lay in his cradle, it is said that men shrank from his gaze as though in fear. His mother, who hoped that Sigmund's words would come true, and her son grow up to avenge his father, asked Hialprek to choose some wise man to bring up the child in a manner befitting his great destiny. It happened that at the king's court there lived a dwarf named Regin. Like many of his kind he was a clever worker in metals, and was learned in all the lore of those days. He was so old that no one remembered his coming, and he had taught Hialprek himself, and his father and grandfather before him. Regin became Sigurd's teacher, and taught him to play and sing, and shoot and ride, and everything else that was suited for the education of a prince. And the old man told the boy tales of battle and adventure, of the past glory of the Volsungs, and how one day he must show himself worthy of his ancestors.

All he said and did was meant to fire the lad's ambition. One day he said to Sigurd—

"What has become of all this gold and treasure which Hiordis brought from the Volsung land? It is yours by right."

"The king and my mother guard it for me," answered the boy. "What do I want with gold?"

Another time Regin said, "You are a capital rider, Sigurd. Why does not Hialprek give you a better horse? All the best ones are kept a long way from here, in the charge of Griper, the king's half-brother. Go and ask him for a horse, but mind you make a good choice, and bring back the best he has."

Sigurd did as Regin bade him. He laid his request before the king, and he answered—

"You shall have your will. Take this token to Griper, and bid him choose for you the best of his war horses."

Sigurd set out gaily on this, his first adventure. After he had gone some distance he caught sight of the lonely mountain fortress where Griper dwelt. The old man welcomed the boy, for he could read the future, and he knew that Sigurd was marked out for great deeds.

"Look," he said, "the horses are grazing in yonder meadow. Go and choose the one you will."

Sigurd went down to the meadow, and there he met an old man, tall and stately, clad in a grey cloak, who asked him what he sought.

Sigurd answered, "I have come here to choose a horse, but how can I tell which is the best?"

Then the stranger said, "I will give you a token by which you may choose. For I know something of horses, and I would back my own against any breeder. Drive the whole herd down to the water at the foot of the hill, and then see what will happen."

Sigurd did as the stranger bade him; he drove the horses down hill and into the water. But the current was strong, and they could not make way against it, and some turned back, and others were swept along by the eddy. Only one swam safely to shore. Then the old man said—

“Choose that one; it will carry you to victory, for it comes of the breed of Sleipner.”

With that he vanished, and Sigurd understood that the horse was a gift from Odin. Its colour was grey, like the god's cloak, and Sigurd named it Greyfell.

Years passed away, and Sigurd had grown older and stronger, when one day Regin called him, and said—

“You are growing to manhood, Sigurd, and the time is come to show what stuff you are made of. At this court you will be only the vassal of kings; you ought to ride out into the world and seek adventures of your own, that you may prove yourself a worthy son of the Volsungs.”

Sigurd answered, “I am willing enough, but tell me what adventure you would have me undertake.”

“Listen,” said Regin, “while I tell you a tale of ancient wrong, which you must avenge, and in so doing win for yourself the greatest treasure on earth.”

“Nay,” said Sigurd, “I covet neither silver nor gold. A horse and a sword are all that a warrior needs. But I will gladly ride out to right the wrong, and the treasure you may have yourself, if you want it.”

ANDWARE'S HOARD.

THIS was the tale that Regin told. Long years ago, when the gods were still young, there lived a wicked and covetous man named Reidmar. He had three sons, Fafner,

Otter, and Regin. Otter loved the water, and could change himself at will into an otter's shape, and in this disguise used to sport and fish in a neighbouring waterfall. One day three of the gods—Odin, Hoener, and Loke—came that way, and saw an otter in the water devouring a salmon. Loke picked up a stone and threw it with such good aim that it killed both salmon and otter. At this he laughed, and picking up his booty, marched off with it. Presently the gods came to Reidmar's house, and when he saw the dead otter he recognized his son. Reidmar was bad and avaricious, and he did not grieve much for the loss of a son, but rather sought an opportunity for making money out of it. He told the travellers that they must pay blood-money for Otter, and held them fast in a snare till they consented. The ransom he demanded was the otter's hide covered inside and outside with gold. Loke promised that he should have it.

In that waterfall where Otter used to sport and play, lived the dwarf Andware, who owned the greatest treasure in the world. A cruel elf had changed him into a pike, and he spent his days in the waterfall, fishing for smaller fish, so that all his hoarded wealth was of no use whatever to him. Loke knew all about Andware and the treasure, and he was able to recognize him in the water even in his fish shape. He went to Ran, the sea goddess, and asked her to lend him the net in which she caught and drew down the bodies of drowning men. In this he caught Andware, and bade him either ransom his life with the treasure or else pay the penalty of death. Andware chose life, and promised to give up the treasure. Then Loke let him out of the net, and he took back his dwarf-shape and showed his captor where the gold and treasure were hidden under a great rock. He told Loke to take it all except one little ring.

When the god saw that the dwarf kept something back, he said—

“Give me that ring too, or your word is broken, and I too shall break mine.”

Then Andware gave him the ring and said, “Because you have taken all my treasure from me, and grudged me this ring which I prize beyond all else in the world, it shall never profit you or any other owner. Cursed be he who wears this ring; it shall bring ruin and death to many and joy to none.”

Loke only laughed at the curse, and took the ring with the rest of the treasure to Reidmar’s house. The gods filled the otter’s hide with gold, then they set it up on end and covered the outside too. But Odin kept Andware’s ring for himself. Reidmar, who cared more for gold than anything else, examined it carefully and said—

“There is one place where the hair is not covered.”

Then Odin drew the ring from his finger and placed it on the bare spot. Thus the curse passed to Reidmar.

It was not long before it began to work, for Fafner and Regin wanted their share of the treasure, and when Reidmar refused to give them any, Fafner killed his own father to get his wealth. When he in turn was asked by Regin for a share, he laughed him to scorn.

“I have won this gold by my father’s murder, and I mean to keep it. Go and seek treasure for yourself, if you want any.”

Then Regin wandered out into the wide world, and came at last to the land of the Danes. He taught the people many useful arts, and became the teacher of princes, and a power and helper in the land. But all his thoughts were of vengeance on his brother, and how he might win the hoard for himself. When he saw the babe with the sturdy limbs and flashing eyes he knew that the avenger

was come at last. That was why he had nurtured and trained Sigurd with such hope and care.

When the youth had heard Regin's tale he said, "You shall have your will, Regin; I will kill Fafner and win the gold for you, if you like it. For myself I want none. What a good warrior needs is not treasure, but a sword. You are the cleverest of all the smiths in the land, do you forge me a sword, with which I may do your will."

Regin gladly promised, and he made a sword for Sigurd. It was of the finest steel, and the hilt was studded with gems.

"Let us put it to the test," cried Sigurd, and struck it on the anvil with all his might. The blade was shivered to atoms, and the boy said scornfully, "How can I stand against my foes with a sword that fails me at the first blow? You must make a stronger one, Regin."

Regin tried a second time, and the steel was more finely tempered than before, and the hilt even richer.

"Try this one," he said, "it will not fail you."

But Sigurd's strength had grown in the mean time, and he struck with greater force than before, and this blade too was shivered to pieces. Then he said—

"I see that even you, Regin, have not cunning enough to forge a sword for such needs as mine. Only a god can give what a god-like hero needs. My mother shall give me the fragments of Odin's sword, and from these you may make a new blade that will serve me in my utmost need."

Regin did his bidding, and the old shards were re-smithied into a new sword. This time when Sigurd struck the anvil he cleft it down to the stock. Next he went to the river with a lock of wool, and threw it down the stream, and it fell asunder with one stroke from the sword. Then Sigurd knew he had the blade he needed. He named



SIGURD AND REGIN.

it the Wrath, because with it he meant to avenge the wrongs of his father and Regin.

HOW SIGURD SLEW THE DRAGON.

SIGURD'S first task was to avenge his father. To do this he had to cross the sea with an army, for he could not fight with Lynge alone and unaided. Hialprek gave him a fleet and troops, and with these he set out to fight the sons of Hunding. On the way they were overtaken by a storm, and the ships were tossed about by the waves and driven towards a headland that jutted out into the water. On the edge of this stood an old man, who called out to them, and said—

“Who fares so fast over the stormy sea?”

“Sigurd, Sigmund's son. We called for a breeze to carry us to death. Who asks my name?”

“Men call me Hnikar when I feed the vultures with corpses, Feng when I lay the stormy seas to rest. Take me into your ship, and I will give you an easy crossing.”

Then they put in to shore, and the old man came on board. At once the waters sank to rest, and the wind grew favourable. This was the second time that Odin had helped Sigurd.

Presently they came to the land of which Lynge was king, and Sigurd sent his soldiers in all directions to plunder the homes and burn the crops and kill the people. These fled in terror before the invaders, and called on King Lynge for help.

“Sigurd, Sigmund's son, is come to destroy us with fire and sword. Fly, fly before him!”

But Lynge did not mean to fly. Instead, he gathered together a great army, and led it against the invaders.

Now, at last, the moment had come for which Sigurd had so ardently longed, when he might punish the man who slew his father. Anger gave strength to his arm, and his keen eye directed his blows. Rank after rank was broken by his unaided might, and the boldest of warriors feared to stand and face him. Thus he hewed his way with his sword and the terror of his gaze, till at last he and Lynge stood face to face. Then began the fiercest combat, for two brave men faced one another full of deadly hate. But at last the wrongdoer fell before the wronged. The good sword Wrath cleft Lynge's helmet and head alike, and passed through his mail-clad body. Lynge lay dead on the field, and the destiny for which Sigurd had been appointed by Hiordis was accomplished. All Lynge's treasure fell into his hands, but he bade his warriors take and share it. For himself he cared not to linger now that his task was done, but returned to his ship and set sail once more for Denmark.

He was now free to take up any adventure he pleased, and his first desire was to keep his promise to Regin and kill Fafner. This was no easy matter, for in order to keep the treasure more securely, Fafner had put on the shape of a hideous dragon, thirty fathoms long, and built a house of iron over the pit where he lay coiled up on the hoard in the midst of a lonely heath. Of course, the gold was of no use to him there, nor was it, indeed, to any one either before or after him; yet his one thought was how to keep it all to himself.

Regin accompanied Sigurd to show him the dragon's lurking-place, but when they were close to it he was afraid, and crept away and hid himself, leaving Sigurd to manage as best he might alone. Before he had gone far he met an old man with a long beard and grey cloak, and he knew that this was the god who had helped him

twice already. He asked Sigurd what he was seeking there, and he answered—

“I have come to slay the dragon that owns the hoard. Yet how I may do the deed I cannot tell.”

Then the old man bade him dig a pit with several channels and hide in one of them. When the dragon passed over them on his way to drink at the stream, Sigurd was to pierce him with his sword from below. The blood would flow into a number of channels, otherwise Sigurd would be drowned in it.

Sigurd did as the old man bade him, for he knew him of old as the wisest of counsellors. He crept into the pit, and it was not long before he heard a terrible hissing noise, which grew louder and louder. The dragon was coming that way, breathing deadly poison from his jaws and nostrils. Some of this fell on Sigurd, but it did not hurt him, for, like his father, he was proof against poison. When the dragon was immediately over the pit, Sigurd thrust his sword under Fafner's left shoulder, and it entered in, right up to the hilt. Then the monster tried to shake himself free, and struck out furiously with head and tail. Sigurd now leapt out of the pit, and drew his sword out of the dragon's side. Then Fafner was able to recognize his foe, and he asked his name, and Sigurd told him. Before he drew his last breath, Fafner prophesied concerning the gold and its bane.

“Better leave it here on the heath,” he said, “for it shall never profit you nor any man. And now one word of warning. Beware of Regin. He has betrayed me; he will betray you too.”

Scarcely was Fafner dead than Regin came back. Though he was glad of his brother's death, he was jealous of Sigurd, thinking that perhaps he might want the treasure for himself, or else that he might grow stronger

and more famous than his master. So he feigned grief and said—

“O Sigurd, you have slain my only brother! Was it well done?”

“Surely it was well done, since it was at your bidding I slew him.”

“For all that I cannot choose but grieve. Now, therefore, do me a service, and perform my bidding this last time. It is the custom with us dwarfs to eat the heart of a fallen foe. Go, therefore, and collect sticks and make a fire and roast Fafner’s heart, that I may eat of my enemy’s flesh and drink of his blood.”

Sigurd did as Regin bade him. He made a fire of sticks, and set the heart on one as a spit, and held it before the flames. When he thought it was tender he touched it to make sure, and the hot flesh scalded his finger. He put it in his mouth to cool, and a strange thing happened. Hardly had he tasted Fafner’s blood than he could understand the language of birds. Seven nutpeckers were perched on a neighbouring tree chatting in their own tongue, and Sigurd understood what they said.

The first said, “There sits Sigurd roasting Fafner’s heart for Regin. He would do better to eat it himself.”

The second said, “There lies Regin, plotting how he may destroy Sigurd.”

The third said, “He ought to send the old greybeard to Hel’s kingdom.”

The fourth said, “It would be well if he understood your advice and followed it.”

The fifth said, “Sigurd would be a fool to let one brother escape now he has slain the other.”

The sixth said, “He will be foolish indeed if he spares the foe who is already plotting his destruction.”

88 *GODS AND HEROES OF THE NORTH.*

The seventh said, "Let him kill Regin, and become lord of all the gold himself."

Then Sigurd hesitated no longer. He went in search of Regin, and, finding him asleep, plunged his sword in his breast. He ate the heart and drank of the blood of both brothers, for the double murder and the savage feast had killed all gentle thoughts within him. Then he lay down to rest, and he heard eagles in a tree singing, and this is what they sang.

"O Sigurd, bind the red rings fast,
Nor ask what fate shall bring,
I know a maiden unsurpast,
A rich mate for a king.

"Green roads lead hence to Giuki's land,
Fate will make plain the road;
And he will give his daughter's hand
For treasure well bestowed.

"On Hindfell high there stands a fort
Within a ring of fire;
A great lord built it for his sport
Of earth and flame's desire.

"Upon this rock a woman armed
Sleeps mid that fiery crown.
'Twas Odin's sleepy thorn that charmed
The maid who won renown.

"Tear off her helm and wake the maid,
Who loved the battle's din;
Only a king's son unafraid,
Through Fate such prize may win."

Sigurd now arose, and went in search of Fafner's hoard. He followed the dragon's track till it brought him to the house where the treasure was concealed. It was of iron, with foundations dug deep in the earth, and made fast on all sides. But now the door stood open, and Sigurd went in. Down in the cellar he found masses of gold heaped up in great piles, both wrought and unwrought. There were rings and jewels in plenty, set with precious stones

and cunningly chased, but the brightest of all was Andware's ring that carried the curse. Sigurd put it on his finger, and placed on his head the Helmet of Dread, and girt about him the golden corselet, which was one of the greatest wonders of the hoard. Then he filled two chests with gold, and put them on Greyfell, but the horse would not move with its load. At last Sigurd leapt on his back, all armed as he was, and then the faithful steed set out at a gallop, and carried Sigurd and the treasure away in search of new adventures. And Andware's curse went with them.

HOW SIGURD WOKE BRYNHILD.

SIGURD had avenged his father, and punished Fafner, and also fulfilled the prophecy that he should kill Regin, his master. His thoughts now turned to fresh adventures, and he rode forth to seek the fair maiden of whom the eagles had sung to him.

So he rode for a while, keeping his steps northward, till he came in sight of a hill called Hindfell. In the distance was a bright light, and when he got nearer he saw that it came from a fire which burned on and on with steady blaze, and yet nothing seemed to be consumed. When he was close at hand he found that the flames came from a circle of fire that surrounded a castle like a moat. The castle itself shone and glittered like the flame, for it was covered with gold and silver shields, which reflected the flames, and looked as though they were all on fire themselves. Sigurd put spurs to his horse, and he carried him straight through the fire, and neither was hurt. At first the whole place seemed deserted, for there was no sign or sound of life, but in the inmost court of the castle



BRYNHILD'S AWAKENING.

Sigurd saw a sleeping form covered with armour and the vizor down. He drew off the helmet and cut open the corselet, and a beautiful maiden stood up and spoke to him.

"Who are you," said she, "who have roused me from my long slumber?"

"My name is Sigurd, Sigmund's son."

"Long have I slept. Sorrow's night is a lasting one. Odin pricked me with the thorn of slumber, and I could not shake off the charm."

Then Sigurd asked her name, and she filled a cup with mead, and pledged him in it.

"All hail to you; Day and Night," she said, "and fruitful Earth. Hail to you also, Gods and Goddesses, grant us joy and victory." Then she told her tale. "My name is Brynhild, and I was a Valkyrie in the days gone by. Many a time I joined in the battle, and gave victory to whom I would. But once I crossed Odin's will. Two kings were at war with one another. One was old, and a brave and tried warrior; the other was young, and new to the fight. Him I favoured, and gave him the victory, though Odin had promised it to his foe. Then Allfather was wroth with me, and punished me, saying that I should never again be a giver of victory. No more should I join in the fray as a Valkyrie, but should live like other women, and wed a man of my own kind. But I answered, 'If wed I must, send me a husband who knows no fear. For a warrior maid cannot mate with a coward.' Then Odin pricked me with the thorn of sleep, and set me here in this fortress, and put a ring of flame about it. Never should I wake from my slumbers till a fearless warrior should ride through the flames and unloose my corselet. Only he would have power to do it who brought with him Fafner's gold."

"I am that man," said Sigurd; "and the gold is yours."

Then he put Andware's ring on her finger, and they pledged their troth with joy and gladness. And after a while Sigurd rode out once more in search of adventure, and Brynhild abode his return.

HOW SIGURD DWELT AMONG THE NIBLUNGS.

IN the country that lay about the southern district of the Rhine lived the hardy race of the Niblungs. Their warriors were renowned for their courage, and the bravest of them all was the king himself. His name was Giuke, and his wife was Grimhild, a very wise woman, who knew something of magic, as well as the harmless arts. They had three sons, Gunnar, Hogné, and Guttorm, and one daughter, Gudrun. It happened one night that Gudrun had a strange dream. She thought she was at the chase with her brothers, and a falcon came and perched on her wrist. His plumage was of gold, and his eyes flashed in the sun. She drew him to her breast and fondled him, and vowed that she would never let the falcon go from her again. The memory of this dream troubled her greatly, and she asked her maids if they could read it for her. And one of them, wiser than the rest, said—

"The falcon is a mighty prince, who shall come in glittering armour to woo you, and you will take him to your heart, and keep him there."

One day, when the Niblung princes were feasting in the hall, word was brought that a warrior outside asked speech of the king. He was taller than any man in the land, his armour was of glittering gold, and on his shield

was painted the picture of a dragon. He seemed more like one of the gods than a man born of men. Giuke himself went out to greet the stranger.

"Who are you who come riding into our city without leave from king or princes? Tell me your name and kin."

"I am Sigurd, Sigmund's son, of Volsung kin. It was I who killed the dragon and took the treasure. Now my heart yearns after fresh adventures."

Then Giuke bade him welcome, and led him into the hall. Each of the princes came to greet him with courteous words; but Gudrun blushed with joy and wonder, for something whispered to her that the falcon had come at last.

Sigurd remained a long while with the Niblungs, and all men learned to love him. At the chase none rode further or aimed straighter than he; at the feast he sang the best song and told the merriest tale; and when the princes went to war against their neighbours, Sigurd went with them and made their victory sure. Whenever he spoke of leaving them again, the king and princes begged him to remain, but Gudrun smiled and kept silence. All this while Grimhild watched her daughter, and she said to herself—

"Here is a fitting husband for Gudrun. No other man is so handsome and brave as he, and he owns the greatest treasure on earth."

But Sigurd had no thought for Gudrun, and Grimhild guessed that he had left his love behind, and his heart was no longer free. She therefore mixed with great cunning a drink of sweet wine, but in it were the herbs that bring forgetfulness. This she gave to Sigurd one evening at the banquet, and pledged him with kind words. He drank it, and the past grew dim in his mind; the memory of

Brynhild faded away, and he looked on Gudrun, and thought her the fairest of women. Then Grimhild said to Giuke—

“Sigurd is the richest and noblest prince in the world. Let us give him our daughter Gudrun in marriage.”

Giuke answered, “It is not the custom for kings to offer their daughters in marriage, but it is a greater honour to offer a bride to Sigurd than to receive the suit of another.”

One evening, when Gudrun was pouring out mead for the princes, Giuke said to Sigurd—

“You have fought bravely for us, Sigurd, and increased our dominion and our glory. And we give you hearty thanks.”

And Gunnar said, “Remain among us, and we will give you a kingdom and a bride. My sister Gudrun is yours, if you will take her.”

“I thank you and accept,” said Sigurd, for the memory of Brynhild was gone from his mind.

Soon after this Sigurd and Gudrun were married, and the feasting lasted for many days and nights.

Time passed by, and Sigurd remained with the Niblungs, and rode out with them in war and dwelt in their halls in time of peace. Gudrun bore him a son, whom they named Sigmund, and their days passed in love and gladness. One sorrow came to them when the old king died; but his life had been long and fortunate. Victory had often crowned his arms; and they thought of him made young again among the feasts and tournaments of Valhalla. Gunnar, the eldest son, succeeded to the throne, and Grimhild bade him seek a wife for himself.

“The fairest and noblest of women alone is worthy to wed with the Niblung king,” said she. “Brynhild, sister of Atle, the Hun king, were the bride for you.”

Gunnar thought that his mother's counsel was good, and promised to do her bidding. He called together his noblest warriors, and asked Hogne and Sigurd to ride with him when he went to court Brynhild. Sigurd consented readily, for he had forgotten his former love, and knew not what he was doing. So they set out together for Atle's castle, and Gunnar asked him for the hand of his sister. Atle, for his part, was willing enough; but it was not in his power to decide the matter.

"For she has sworn only to wed that man who can ride through fire. Her hall is surrounded by a ring of flame. Ride through it and win her, if you can and may."

Then Gunnar and his companions turned away once more, and rode northward till they came to the mountain where Brynhild abode in her flame-girt castle, awaiting the return of Sigurd. Even now the memory of the past did not return to him. Gunnar bade the others wait outside for him while he put spurs to his horse and rode it through the flames. But neither spur, nor blow, nor word of encouragement or blame would drive it one step forward. At last Gunnar said—

"Lend me Greyfell, Sigurd. He is the boldest horse in the world; he will not shy at the flames."

Then Sigurd dismounted, and Gunnar got on Greyfell's back and urged him forward. But it was of no use; Greyfell would allow none but Sigurd to ride him. At last Sigurd said—

"Let us change shapes. Do you put on the Helmet of Dread, and take my form upon you. I will wear your shape for a while, and ride through the flames and win you a bride."

So they changed shapes, for Grimhild had given them this strange power; and Gunnar put on Sigurd's armour,

and his face became the face of Sigurd. He himself, in the semblance of Gunnar, mounted Greyfell and rode through the flames for a second time. Then he entered the hall, and when Brynhild saw him she was amazed, and said—

“Who are you that come riding through the flames to my hall? Tell me your name and kin.”

“I am Gunnar, Giuke’s son, of Niblung race. I am come to win your hand. Your brother Atle has given his consent, provided I could make my way to you, and ask your own.”

Brynhild now rose from her seat and stood before him in full armour, with corselet and helmet, and her sword was in her hand.

“Gunnar,” she said, “beware how you speak such words to me if you are not the bravest man on earth, for I am a warrior maid. I have taken part in battle, and dyed my sword in blood. And the longing for the fight possesses me still.”

“Remember your vow, to wed the man who should ride through the flames.”

Then Brynhild knew not how to answer, and she could no longer resist him, though a great wonder held her. She knew that only Sigurd and Greyfell could pass through fire unscathed, and she could not guess the trick that had been played her. Her word once given could not be recalled, and she consented to wed Gunnar. In ten days she promised to come to the Niblung land. Sigurd now put another ring on her finger, and took from it Andware’s ring, with which he had once plighted troth to her. This he now gave to Gudrun.

Within the ten days Brynhild arrived at the Niblung court in state, and was married to Gunnar with great pomp and feasting. Now that she and Sigurd met daily,

his memory slowly came back, and the magic potion lost its power. When he realized what had happened, he grew very sorrowful, and his heart was full of regrets for his lost love. But he said no word, for she was the wife of Gunnar, his friend and sworn brother; and he resolved to be faithful to Gudrun, and worthy of her great love for him.

THE DEATH OF SIGURD.

BRYNHILD, for her part, had never forgotten. She recognized Sigurd as soon as she saw him at the Niblung court, and jealousy turned her great love to hate. Though she pretended to treat Gudrun as a sister, her heart was full of rage and anger. But neither she nor Sigurd spoke a word or gave any sign that they remembered the past, and for a while all seemed to go well. Then one day a quarrel broke out between the two queens.

It happened that they had both gone down to bathe in the Rhine; but Brynhild tried to avoid Gudrun, and kept at a distance from her. Then she said—

“Why do you avoid me, Brynhild?”

“Because I am far above you. Do you presume to call yourself my equal? My father was a mightier king than yours. And your husband was a thrall in King Hialprek’s house, and little better than a vassal in ours. Mine is king of the Niblung folk, and the bravest man on earth. He alone had courage to ride through the fire to win a bride.”

At this Gudrun laughed a scornful laugh, and she forgot her love for her brother and Sigurd’s warning to keep silence, and said—

“Look at this token on my finger. Can you not recognize Andware’s ring? Do you suppose it was my

brother who gave it me? It was not Gunnar, but Sigurd in his shape, who rode through the fire to your hall, and won you for your timorous husband. Sigurd is the bravest man on earth; he slew the dragon, he rode through the fire. Presume not to call yourself the equal of his wife."

When she heard this, Brynhild was struck with dismay. Now, at last, she understood the trick that had been played her, and that she was married to a man who was not a stranger to fear. The blood left her cheeks, and she stared at Gudrun in silent dismay; then she turned and walked slowly back to the palace. Not one word did she speak that day, but went about as in a dream.

In the evening Gudrun said to Sigurd, "Why is Brynhild so sad and silent?"

"I cannot tell; but I have a foreboding of evil."

"Why is she not content with her lot? She has married the man of her choice."

"Did she tell you who was the husband of her choice?"

"I will ask her to-morrow."

"Do not ask her," said he; "you might repent it."

Next morning, when the two queens were sitting together in their chamber, and Brynhild still kept silence, Gudrun said—

"What ails you, Brynhild? If I have said anything to vex you, forgive me, and tell me your sorrow."

"It is your malice and wickedness that make you ask. Be content with your own lot, and do not concern yourself with mine."

"Why are you angry with me?"

"Are you not the wife of Sigurd, the bravest man on earth? Mine he was, first of all, and to me he pledged



THE SORROW OF BRYNHILD.

his troth. You have all deceived me by a trick, but I will be revenged on you, be assured of that."

"What more would you have? Your husband is a great king, and the master of much treasure."

"Sigurd killed the dragon, Sigurd rode through the flames, when Gunnar's courage failed him."

So the two parted with bitter words, and Brynhild went to her room. There she lay down on her golden couch, and neither spoke to her maids nor ate the food they brought her. They told Gunnar that the queen lay sick on her bed; and he went and asked what ailed her. First she would give no answer; at last, when he begged and prayed for a word, she said—

"Tell me what you did with the ring you took from my finger. With it I had pledged my troth to the man who rode Greyfell through the flames. None but Sigurd had the courage for the deed. It was he killed the dragon, it was he rode through the flames, not you, Gunnar. Your pale face shows that I speak the truth. I have sworn to love none but Sigurd, but you have deceived me, and my oath is broken. Therefore I will be avenged on you and Grimhild."

Then Gunnar went away sadly, and left her plotting evil. In vain her maids tried to rouse her, in vain Hognl spoke words of cheer to her. She gave answer to none, but lay, pale and silent, on her bed.

Seven days went by, and Brynhild neither ate nor spoke but lay as in a trance. Then Sigurd said to Gudrun—

"Brynhild will die."

"Some magic power must keep her alive, for she has not woke up for seven days and nights."

"She is not sleeping, but plotting evil against me."

"Woe is me!" cried Gudrun; "go to her and try to allay her anger."

Then Sigurd went to the queen's apartment, and stepped up to the bed where she lay. He drew aside the curtain and said—

"Wake up, Brynhild; the sun is shining, and there is gladness everywhere. Cast aside your sorrow, and rejoice with us."

Then her wrath gave her speech, and she said—

"How dare you come here to ask of my sorrow! Well, you shall be answered. It was not Gunnar who rode to me through the flames. I was amazed when I saw the man who entered my hall and called himself Gunnar. It was you who deceived me then."

"Gunnar too is a brave warrior. My fame is no greater than his."

"It was you who killed the dragon, it was you who rode through the fire. You are the noblest of men; and I hate and despise Gunnar."

Then Sigurd too began to lament for the past and the loss of Brynhild, and he cursed the magic that had blinded his eyes. He went sadly to Gunnar, and told him that speech had returned to the queen. Then Gunnar himself went back to her and asked of her sorrow and its remedy.

"Sigurd deceived me," she said, "when he rode in your shape to my hall. My troth was given him, and one of you must die; or better let me die, for Gudrun mocks at me, and I no longer care to live."

That evening Brynhild arose from her bed, and went out into the darkness. Over the hills she went, and through the woods, moaning and lamenting her lot. At daybreak she returned to the palace, and said to Gunnar—

"I will leave you and go back home, and spend my days in sleep and solitude, unless you kill Sigurd."

Gunnar was very sad when he heard this, for Sigurd

had been his friend and helper. Therefore he took counsel of Hogue. But he said—

“Why should we weaken our power of our own free will? If we four princes stand together, we are a match even for the gods.”

Still Gunnar could not give Brynhild up. His love for her, and the craving for Sigurd’s treasure, were stronger than his loyalty; for the curse on the gold was at work. Gunnar, Hogue, and Sigurd had poured out their blood on the ground together, as was the custom of those who took the oath of brotherhood. Therefore they could not raise their hands against one another. But Guttorm, the youngest, had not taken the oath, and they called on him to kill Sigurd. Not till they had given him a magic potion to drink, and wolf’s flesh to eat, would he consent to do so treacherous a deed.

Guttorm knew well enough that Sigurd was more than a match for any enemy, and therefore resolved to kill him in his sleep. Late at night he went to the room where the hero lay, but Sigurd opened his eyes, and looked at Guttorm, and he drew back in terror. A second time he went, and again one glance from Sigurd’s eyes drove him back afraid. The third time he found Sigurd asleep, and plunged his sword in his breast. Then Sigurd awoke, and seized his sword Wrath, which always lay ready to his hand, and threw it at Guttorm as he fled from the room. It cut him in two, so that head and hands fell in one direction, and his feet in another.

Guðrun awoke, to find her husband in a pool of blood. He tried to comfort her, saying—

“Weep not, Guðrun, for you still have brothers to love you. This is Brynhild’s deed. This is how she showed her love.”

Then Guðrun uttered a cry that resounded through

the whole palace. Brynhild heard it in her chamber, and laughed aloud, for she knew there was a woman in the world more unhappy than she. But Gunnar and Hogne wished the deed undone.

Next morning the palace resounded with sounds of woe. Only Gudrun did not join in the lament. In silence she sat by Sigurd's corpse, and spoke no word and shed no tear. All thought she would die in her dumb sorrow. Her attendants spoke to her each in turn, and told of Sigurd's glory and great deeds and of the sorrows they themselves had suffered. But Gudrun still sat dry-eyed and silent. At last one of them stepped forward and took the cloth from Sigurd's face, and laid his head in Gudrun's lap. When she looked at that pale and lifeless countenance, and the bright, golden hair, and the breast that the sword had pierced, the tears came with a rush, and she wept her fill over her dead lord. And amid her tears she cursed Brynhild and Gunnar.

"Sigurd's gold shall bring you no good, Gunnar," she cried, "for you have broken your oath to your sworn brother."

Then Brynhild herself came to look upon the dead Sigurd, and her love was awakened once more, and she too cursed Gunnar.

"Sigurd's death lies at your door," she said, "but it shall not profit you. You and all your kin shall perish miserably, because of your broken oath. Sigurd was never false to you, but I count him as my husband. Twice he rode to me through the flames, twice I pledged him my troth. Now that he is gone, I no longer care to live, but will follow Sigurd to the grave."

Then Gunnar put his arms about her, and spoke words of comfort, and tried to turn her from her purpose. He even called Hogne, and told him to let his soldiers keep

guard over the queen, and see that she did herself no wrong.

But Hogue said, "Let no man try to turn her from her purpose. She was born to bring sorrow and strife among men. May we never see her like on earth again!"

So Brynhild had her will, and plunged a sword into her own breast. As she lay dying she prophesied to Gunnar of the things to come.

"My brother Atle will avenge my death on you and Hogue. You will both perish miserably, and then Atle too will be slain. Better were it for Gudrun to mount the funeral pile to-day, by her husband's side. She will live indeed, longer than the rest of you, but only to work and suffer woe. One thing I would ask of you before I breathe my last. When I am dead lay my body by Sigurd's. Build up a great pyre for us both, and set it round with shields and hangings. Place our two bodies side by side, and with us men and maids whom you shall slay to give us escort in death. Gold and treasure lay beside me, that I may lack nothing in the house of the gods. Thus shall I follow Sigurd, and before the golden door has closed on him, I shall enter in with my goodly following. Breath fails me to utter more, but ere long you shall learn that my words are true ones."

Then she fell back dying, and Gunnar did her bidding. A great pyre was built up in the courtyard, and on it they laid Sigurd and Brynhild, all arrayed in gold, and the little Sigmund, whom Guttorm had killed with his father. And beside them were the men and maids who were chosen to follow their lords in death. Then they set fire to the pile, and as the flames mounted upward, the spirits of Sigurd and Brynhild rose together to join the brave revellers who feast in Valhalla with Odin.

THE END OF THE NIBLUNGS.

Now that Sigurd and Brynhild were dead Gunnar and Hogne took Fafner's gold, and with it Andware's curse. For Brynhild's prophecies were fulfilled, and the glorious days of the Niblungs were ended. First Atle demanded satisfaction for Brynhild's death, and threatened to make war on them. To conciliate him they gave him Gudrun in marriage; but this was the beginning of further sorrow. Atle coveted the Niblung treasure, and claimed a part of it as Gudrun's dowry. Gunnar and Hogne refused to give him any, and concealed it in a safe place lest he should try to steal it away from them. As he could not win it by fair means, Atle resorted to a trick. He sent a messenger with letters to King Gunnar, bidding him and Hogne to the Hunnish court. There he and Gudrun would give them good entertainment, and they would feast and be merry, and forget all past quarrels. Gudrun, who guessed his purpose, sent Andware's ring by the same messenger, with a wolf's hair twisted round it as a symbol of treachery. She also sent them a piece of wood on which she had carved warning signs. But the messenger altered them, so that their meaning was changed, and they could not be clearly read.

When the princes received Atle's message they were uncertain whether to go or stay. They could not decipher the altered signs, but they noticed the wolf's hair and guessed its meaning. But when they had drunk and feasted, and the messenger had boasted of Atle's power and wealth, and told how his kingdom lacked an heir, since his sons were yet but children, Gunnar said—

"Well, be it so, come good, come ill, we will to the land of Atle."

But because of Gudrun's warning and the strange dreams of Hogne's wife, they took the gold and treasure for which so many had suffered and perished, and threw it into the Rhine. And none knew where it fell.

Full of sad forebodings Gunnar and Hogne set out for Atle's court. Gladly would they have remained in their own land, but their word had been given, and a king's promise could not be broken. Indeed, their fears were but too well founded, for Atle received them with an escort of armed men.

"Give me the Niblung treasure," he said, "or it will be the worse for you."

"Never!" cried Gunnar; "the treasure is hidden deep in the river, and never shall you know where it lies."

Then they made ready for battle, but Atle had filled his hall with soldiers, and Gunnar and Hogne were alone, but for their kinsmen and a score of attendants. Gudrun in her chamber heard the clash of arms, and she came forth and fought in the hall by the side of her brothers. For wrong and suffering had turned the gentlest and most timid of maids into a fierce and pitiless woman.

The fighting went on all that night and the next day. At last none of the Niblungs were left alive but Gunnar and Hogne. Then they were overpowered and taken, and Atle put them to death with horrible cruelty.

And now poor Gudrun went mad with grief, and she brooded on her revenge. First, she killed her own sons, and gave Atle their flesh to eat. Then, as he lay sleeping after the banquet, she plunged a dagger in his heart.

But because he was a king and she a queen and his wife, she gave him fitting burial. She took his corpse and washed it and made it ready; and she placed it in a ship covered with a splendid pall, and put gold and silver

by his side. Then the ship put out to sea, and carried away the dead king and his treasure.

Yet Gudrun did not think her revenge complete as long as any of Atle's followers lived. In the night time she set fire to the great hall where the warriors slept, and they were all consumed by the flames. Then Gudrun herself leapt into the fire and perished there, the last victim of Andware's curse. By it three great kings and two queens had met their death. For the gold had wrought no man good, but it had brought woe and death to Sigurd, the mighty, and to Brynhild, and ruin on the whole race of the Niblungs. It was well, indeed, that no man ever drew it forth from its hiding-place; for men say the peaceful waters of the Rhine still flow over the spot where the curse and the gold are buried from sight for ever.

III. THE STORY OF HELGE.

HELGE was the son of Sigmund and Borghild, and half-brother to Sigurd. In the night of his birth the Norns came to the palace with gifts for the babe. These were the three ancient sisters who fixed the fate of mortals, and dealt out good or evil fortune to them. Their names were Urd, Skuld, and Verdande, which means Past, Present, and Future. By the light of the moon, while all in the palace slept, they span strong, invisible threads of fate and bound them together in a fast knot. Thus the child's doom was fixed for good or ill. They gave him beauty and courage and nobility, but one of the Norns threw a

thread to the north; and this was a bad omen, for it meant an early death.

When the child was but a day old he stood upright in his cradle, and all the men who saw his sturdy limbs and flashing eyes, rejoiced that a new Volsung was born. Two ravens on an ash-tree in the palace grounds croaked of it to one another.

"Good news, good news! Sigmund's child stands upright in his cradle. He is only a day old, but his eyes flash like a warrior's. He will strew the battlefield with corpses. Good times are coming for us!"

The people, too, rejoiced and said, "The golden age will come back to this land."

Sigmund was away fighting when the child was born, but as soon as the news reached him he hurried home to greet his infant son. He took him up in his arms and named him Helge, and gave him castles and lands as his inheritance, and laid on his breast the leaf of a sacred herb as a token of sovereignty. His last gift to the child was the sword he had brought all blood-stained from battle. He hoped that his son would grow up to use it, and rule over the land after his own death.

As soon as he was old enough to leave his mother, Sigmund put him under the charge of a warrior named Hagal, and bade him train his son in all knightly arts.

At that time a king named Hunding ruled over the neighbouring country. He and Sigmund were always at war, and though many a fierce battle had been fought between the Volsungs and the Hundings, neither had carried off a decisive victory. Sigmund hoped that with the help of Sinfiotle and Helge he would be able to deal a last blow at his old enemy. When the boy was fifteen he went in disguise to Hunding's court to spy out the land. Heming, one of Hunding's sons, was alone at home; and

Helge saw all he wanted; but when he passed through the castle gate, he met a shepherd boy, and spoke to him boasting.

"Go and tell Heming that the boy who prowled about his forts and castle was no other than Helge, and that he wears a warrior's corselet under the grey herdsman's cloak."

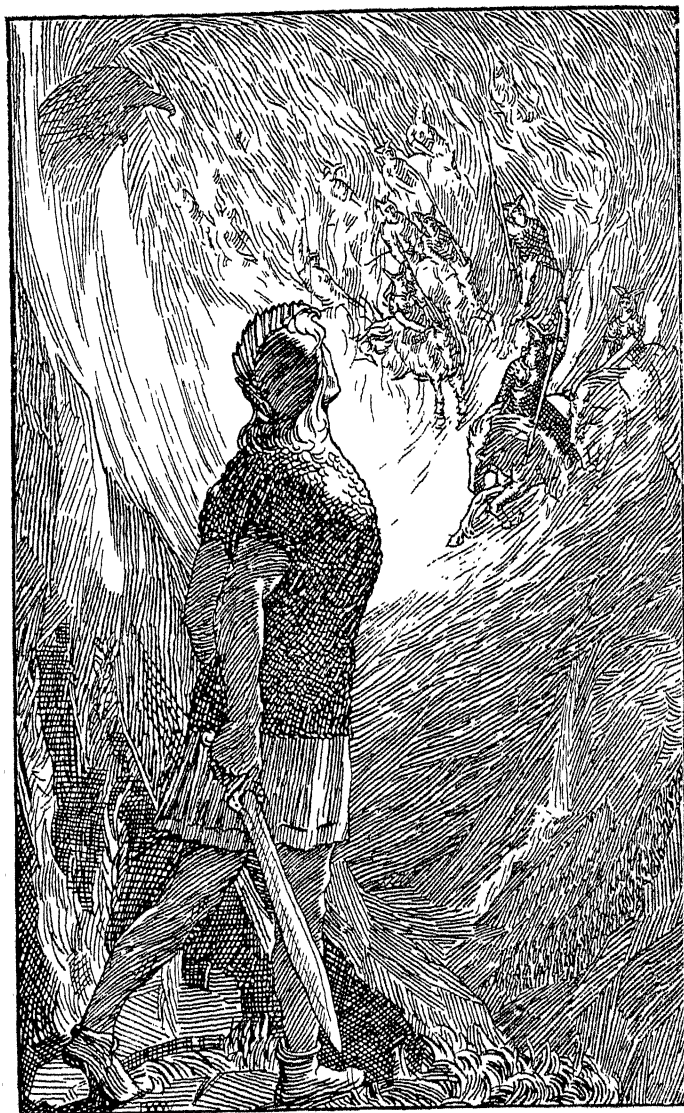
When this message was brought to Heming he was very angry, and considered how he might get Helge into his power. He sent men to Hagal's house with orders to capture the lad and bring him before him in chains. As there was no means of escaping, Helge put on a woman's dress, and joined the maids who were grinding corn in the mill. The messengers looked everywhere for Helge; at last they went into the mill, and one of them said—

"Look at that maid yonder with the flashing eyes. The stones are bursting asunder with the force of her grinding. This surely is no common man's daughter. A sad lot for a hero and a king's son to grind barley in a mill. A sword would beseem that hand better."

Then Hagal answered, "No wonder the stones fret and groan when a king's daughter turns them. Once she was a Valkyrie, and went to battle with kings, but Helge took her prisoner and set her to this menial task."

In this way Helge escaped, and now he and Sinfiotle gathered their forces, and set out for Hunding's land. A great battle was fought between the two armies, in which the Volsung princes were victorious, and Helge himself slew King Hunding, and delivered the Volsungs from their ancient foe.

Hunding's sons now sent to Helge to demand satisfaction for their father's death. They asked for a great sum of gold as blood-money. But Helge would give no ransom.



HELGE AND THE VALKYRIES.

"Odin's wrath and a harvest of spears are all the ransom they will get from me," was his answer.

Then the enemy once more rallied their broken forces, and made ready for a second battle. The two armies met among the Loga mountains, and Helge killed nearly all Hunding's sons with his own hands. At the end of the day he sat down to rest under a great rock, on which eagles and other birds of prey were perched. Suddenly a bright light shone out over the mountain opposite, and lightning was seen in the sky. In the midst of the brightness was a troop of armed maidens, with helmets on their heads, and blood-stained corselets and spears that flashed back the light. They were Valkyries who had taken part in the fight, and were come to greet the victorious prince. Helge invited them to feast with him, but the tallest and noblest of them leapt down from her horse, and said—

"Not so, for we have sterner work on hand than feasting and drinking."

"What is your will?" asked Helge.

"My name is Sigrun. My father, Hagne, promised me in marriage to Hodbrod, King Granmar's son, but I hate and despise him, for he has no more courage than a crow. For all my rudeness to him he is coming to claim me, and my father will give me up unless some brave warrior challenges Hodbrod to battle and steals me away from him."

"Have no fear of Hodbrod," said Helge, "till word reaches you that I am dead."

Helge now resolved to make war on Hodbrod, and for this he had to raise a fresh army. He therefore sent out heralds to offer money and gifts to all who would come and fight for him. They were to go with all speed over sea and land, and get together an army that no foe could resist.

Helge went down to the coast to await his troops, and soon the watchers on the shore caught sight of ships coming in from all parts laden with arms and bringing soldiers for the new war. For Helge's renown had gone out into all the world, and men were glad to fight under his command. He called one of his lords, and asked—

“Have you counted the warriors who are coming to our aid?”

“It is not easy from the land to count the men in the long-beaked ships. Twelve hundred there would seem to be, but there are more to follow.”

At daybreak all the ships hoisted sail and put out to sea once more. Helge's ship was in the centre, and when it raised anchor the men in all the others stood up and clashed their swords and shields together in joyous anticipation of the fight. For the old Norsemen loved a battle even better than a feast.

When they had been at sea for a while a great storm arose; it thundered and lightened, and the wind dashed against the sails, and the waves rose mountain high and threatened to engulf the vessels. Ran, the cruel sea-goddess, made ready her net to catch the drowning sailors; and the grip of her hand was on Helge's ship, for she meant to draw it down to the depths. Then suddenly the dark cloud overhead broke, and a bright light appeared in the sky, and in the midst nine Valkyries on their steeds of war. Sigrun herself snatched Helge's bow from Ran's hand, and set the ship upright again. Directly after the storm subsided, and the ships got safely to land.

Hodbrod's brothers were posted on the top of a hill to watch for the enemy's approach. One of them, named Gudmund, as soon as he caught sight of Helge's fleet, mounted his horse and galloped away to the shore. He hailed the ships, and shouted to the crews—

"What prince brings this mighty army to our shores? I see the flashing of arms and the red shield set up aloft. This is no peaceful mission, but a band of fighting Vikings."

Sinfjotle answered, "This is the brave Prince Helge whom you behold surrounded by his warships. He has conquered the sea, and taken the kingdom of the fishes, which you call your own."

Then Gudmund galloped back uphill with the news. "Fifteen keels have come to land, and there are more to follow. They bring us foes of Volsung race, and Helge the hero leads them. We need a valiant host to drive away these invaders."

So they got ready their army in all haste, and sent to summon allies and neighbours to help them. All gladly responded to the call, and among them came Sigrun's father, Hogne, and his sons Brage and Dag. The two armies met at Frekastein, and there a fierce battle was fought. Sword clashed against sword, and spear struck against shield, and always in the very thickest of the fight there was Helge. With his own hand he killed Hodbrod and Hogne, and many another chieftain. When all was over the sky opened once more, and there was Sigrun all armed and fresh from the battle. She came down and stood beside Helge, and greeted him.

"Hail, victor!" she cried, "you have slain the cruel prince who wooed me. Now I bring you your reward. This maid and her kingdom are yours. Long may you live, and victory crown your arms!"

Then Helge took her in his arms and kissed her. "I thank you, fair maid," he said, "for the victory you have helped to give me, and the love you offer me. Alas! my gain is not wholly yours, for I slew the man you hated, but others dear to you have fallen on the field. I have

killed your father and Brage, and many another of your kinsmen who withstood me in the battle. Dag, too, fell into my hands, but he swore fealty to me, and I gave him his life."

"Would my father and brother yet lived," sighed Sigrun, "and that I could have you as my lord also."

"Weep not, Sigrun," said Helge, "you brought me victory, and no man can escape his fate."

This is how Helge won his bride. They were married now, and lived happily together for a few years. But Helge's fate was to die young. Dag could not forgive him for his father's death, and he offered a sacrifice to Odin, and prayed that he might be permitted to avenge the death of Hagne. Odin heard his prayer, and lent him the spear Gungner, which never missed its aim and always returned to the hand that threw it. Dag went to look for Helge, and he came upon him wandering in the forest, and killed him with Odin's spear. Then he went straight to Sigrun and told her what he had done.

Sigrun burst into tears, and cursed her brother. "May the oaths that you swore to Helge by the sacred stream of Leipt work your destruction! May the ship in which you sail never stir from the spot, though a favouring breeze fill the sails! May the horse not run on which you mount, though you fled from the deadliest of foes! The sword you draw shall not strike unless it be brandished round your own head! Were you a wolf of the forest lacking food and succour, with naught to feed on but corpses, that were your desert for Helge's murder!"

In vain Dag tried to allay her wrath. "It was Odin who stirred up strife between kinsmen. Blame him, not me."

Then he offered her blood-money—gold in plenty, castles and lands, even the half of his kingdom if she would be appeased.

But Sigrun would have none of these things. "Woe is me for my dead lord," she cried, "he was the bravest and noblest of warriors. Helge towered above all other men as the ash-tree overtops thorn-bushes. Nevermore shall I know gladness, unless the gates of Helge's tomb burst open, and his trusty steed carries him forth to battle once more."

Helge was buried with much honour and pomp. They set his horse and armour beside him, and raised a high mound over the dead warrior. That same evening one of Sigrun's handmaids went to the mound with offerings, and saw to her amazement that the gates were open. And from them rode forth Helge and all his following.

"What," she cried, "do my senses deceive me, or has the last day come? Surely the dead are riding forth from their tombs."

Then Helge himself answered her, "Your senses do not deceive you, nor has the last day come, though we ride forth from our tombs on swift steeds. The gods themselves have granted us leave to revisit our homes once more."

The maid hastened back to her mistress with the wonderful news.

"Haste you, Sigrun," she cried, "if you desire to see your lord. The gates of his mound are open, and Helge has come forth. His ancient wounds are bleeding afresh, he bids you come and staunch them."

Sigrun tarried for no more words, but hurried away to meet her dear lord. She took him in her arms and kissed him. Then she shuddered and said—

"O Helge, your hair is damp with sweat, the blood drips from your limbs, and your hands are chill and cold! How may I bring you succour?"

"You, Sigrun, are the cause of this trouble. For last

night you wept bitter tears ere you went to rest, and each fell like a blood-drop on Helge's breast."

Then Sigrun put her arms about him and led him back into the tomb, and they spent the long night together there in loving embrace. But at daybreak Helge arose and left her, for he must be on the other side of Bifrost before the cock roused the warriors of Valhalla.

Odin gave Helge welcome and bade him share his rule. But Sigrun had no joy in life without him, and she soon died of grief and pining. It is said by some that she and Helge were born again, and lived and loved and suffered for a second time as they had done before.

IV. THE STORY OF BEOWULF.

HOW BEOWULF FOUGHT WITH GRENDL.

IN the days of which this story tells, a king called Heremond ruled over the Danish folk. In his youth he was a wise and good lord, but afterwards he grew hard and cruel; and the people were troubled because he had no sons, and they knew not who would rule over the land after him. Then one day a strange thing happened. Some men who were walking by the shore noticed a ship making for the land. A bright light shone forth from a ring of shields that was set all round it, and from the mast-tree floated a golden banner. Beneath this lay a sleeping boy, with arms and treasures piled all around him. The news of this wonderful sight spread among the people, and they ran down to the beach, saying—

"Surely this is the son of a god, and he has come to rule over us, and bring us good fortune."

Amid general rejoicings his ship was drawn to land, and they named the boy Shield, because a shield-decked ship had brought him to that land.

So Shield grew up among the Danes, and after the king's death he mounted the throne, and for many long years he ruled over the Danes. In time of war he led them to victory, in peace he dealt out justice to all, and gave freely to the poor and needy. At last he died full of years and honours, and they gave him a splendid funeral. They fitted out a ship, and decked it with shields and armour, like the one that had brought him. On this they laid their dead lord, and heaped his corpse with gold and treasure. The same golden standard that had fluttered over the boy now sheltered the home-faring warrior on his last voyage. When all was ready they loosened the ropes, and the ship drifted out to sea. Thus Shield, the warrior king, went back to the unknown deep whence he had come.

His son and grandson reigned after him, and then his great-grandson Hrothgar came to the throne. He was a generous and noble prince, and the father of his people. Many a fine palace and castle was built by him, but the most splendid of all was the great hall where he and his warriors used to feast at night and drink long draughts of mead, while minstrels sang them songs of love and war. This was the highest building in the land, and on the eastern and western gables were carvings of stags' heads. From these it got its name Heorot, which is the old Danish word for stag.

In the marshy fen-land between the city and the shore a monster called Grendel had his lair. He was a hideous creature with fiery eyes and iron claws, akin to the wicked giants who fought against the gods of Asgarth, and his favourite food was human flesh. When Grendel

unaided, and deliver you from him for ever. And since I have heard that weapons have no power to hurt him, let me meet him with neither sword nor shield, but grip him only with my strong arms, and match my strength with his and see which shall prevail."

"Gladly do I grant your request," answered Hrothgar. "And you shall seek the adventure, if you will. But you will not be the first to attempt it; and if you fail, you will but add another to the tale of Grendel's victims. Again and again have the bravest of my lords begged leave to watch here at night in their armour and grapple single-handed with the foe; but always when we returned in the morning we saw the traces of the conflict and the ground stained with blood and strewn with the torn limbs of the victims. This warning it is right to give you."

But Beowulf was not to be frightened by any tales of battle. He had fought with giants in the past and slain his foe; and if Grendel were fiercer and more hideous even than these, so much the more glorious was the adventure he was about to undertake.

That night, at Beowulf's request, the banquet was once more set out in Heorot, and the heroes feasted and drank, and the minstrels harped and sang. When the feast was at its height, the queen herself came into the hall, and poured out a goblet of mead for the new-comer.

"Praised be Allfather," said she, "who sent you here to deliver me in my sore need! I thank and pledge you."

"I accept your pledge," said he, "and I will accomplish the vow which I took when I entered my ship, that I would end the sorrows of the Danes or myself perish in the monster's grip."

When the last rays of the setting sun began to stream through the windows, the king and queen left the hall, and all the earls and thanes followed them; for now the

hour of danger was at hand, and Beowulf wished to meet the foe alone.

When all the Danes had departed he laid aside his helmet and corselet and handed his sword to one of his comrades.

"I deem myself in no way inferior to Grendel in might and malice," said he, "and, like him, will contend with strength of arm alone. May Odin, lord of victory, be my helper!"

Then he stretched himself out on one of the benches, and his comrades lay down beside him. Soon all were asleep but Beowulf, and he kept watch for the safety of Denmark.

Presently a noise of roaring and stamping heralded the approach of Grendel. He threw himself with all his might against the door and burst it open. For a moment he stood still and looked round the hall in search of booty. Then he fell with a rush on one of the sleeping warriors, and tore him to pieces. Next he stepped up to Beowulf, and meant to seize him too; but quick as lightning he caught the monster's fist in his own, and would not let him go. When Grendel felt that iron grip he knew that at last he had met a strength greater than his own. He struggled to free himself, that he might take flight from the hall, but all his efforts were vain. Without loosing hold of Grendel, Beowulf sprang to his feet, and forced the monster to wrestle with him. Grendel knew that he was beaten, and desired only to escape to his rocky fastness. But his captor would not let him go with his life.

The struggle lasted a long time, and the hall was full of the sound of crashing timber and the howls of the monster and the cries of the combatants. Men heard it far away on the ramparts, and prayed for Beowulf's victory.

All this while Beowulf's comrades had not been idle, for they were eager to take their share in the fight. But though they fenced Grendel round with a ring of iron swords, the points darted harmless off his scaly hide, and Beowulf had to bear the brunt of the battle alone. So the two still struggled in each other's grip, and Grendel tugged and tugged and tried to tear his wrist from the deadly grasp of his foe. At last the violence with which he pulled caused a wound in Grendel's shoulder; the veins sprang open and the sinews burst asunder. Grendel freed himself with a hideous yell, and rushed from the hall, leaving his arm and fist in Beowulf's grasp. He took the hand with its claws of cruel iron and fastened it to the highest gable on Heorot. That was a signal of victory, to show that his task was accomplished.

At daybreak men came stealthily to the hall to see how Beowulf had fared, and when they saw the hand and arm they hurried back to spread the good news. It was not long before the king and queen themselves came in state to greet and thank Beowulf; and there was a constant stream of curious persons who came to see the great hero from over the sea, and gaze at the scene of a danger now past. Then the king said to Beowulf—

"For this great boon I thank, first of all, Odin, lord of victory, and next you, oh brave hero of the Geats! Long had I despaired of ridding my kingdom of the curse, and I deemed that ruin and bloodshed would still be the lot of my people. You have saved us, Beowulf. Blessed, if she still lives, is the mother who bore you. Henceforth you shall be to me as a son."

Then he gave orders to cleanse the hall and deck it for a feast. Men and maidens came hurrying in. They cleared away the broken seats and tables and hung bright embroideries on the walls, while the cooks made the

banquet ready. That evening the warriors feasted once more in Heorot, and of course Beowulf was the hero of the hour. Hrothgar gave him a golden banner, a helmet and corselet, and a sword with a jewelled hilt. Outside in the courtyard eight fine war-horses were drawn up, and on one was a magnificent saddle all decked with jewels. This was the king's, and it was his custom to ride on it; but now he gave it freely to Beowulf in token of gratitude, and still felt that the great debt remained unpaid. There was a gift, too, for each of the comrades of Beowulf; and as for the luckless one who had been Grendel's first victim, the king bade men weigh his corpse and count out the weight in gold as a ransom.

When Beowulf had received all these gifts and thanked the king in courteous speech, the harpers played and sang the deeds of mighty heroes. They told of Finn, the Frisian king, and his fight with the great chieftain Hengest, but of all the tales they told none was more wonderful than the story of the fight between Grendel and Beowulf.

When the singing was ended the queen and her fair daughter entered the hall, and went in and out among the warriors, pouring out mead and speaking words of cheer. First the queen handed a goblet to Hrothgar, and said—

“May fortune and victory be ever with you, my lord and husband, now that peace and joy have at last returned to this land! Long may you live and remember the boon done you by the Geats!”

Then she handed a goblet to Beowulf. “Drink this, brave hero,” she said, “and accept at my hands these bracelets of gold and this jewelled necklet. May you live long and gloriously, and be a helper and protector to my sons!”

Then she took her seat beside the king, and this was a signal for fresh feasting. The cup passed round and round, the singing and laughing grew louder and louder, and all gave themselves up to merriment, for now, they thought, there was no creature living that could bring danger to Heorot.

THE SECOND FIGHT.

For the first time after twelve years the warriors felt safe in their hall, and stretched themselves out as of old on the benches ranged round the walls, intending to pass the night there. But the king and queen and their attendants withdrew to their palace, and a special guest chamber was made ready for Beowulf, where he might rest in peace and quiet after the night's work and the day's rejoicings.

It was not long before the sleepers were roused by a loud clattering and roaring, just like the terrible noise which in former times had heralded Grendel's coming. Once more the door was burst open, and a hideous monster rushed into the hall. This was Grendel's mother, a creature as ugly and wicked as her son, and filled with even fiercer hatred for the Danish king and his courtiers. She had come to take vengeance for her son's injury, and to recover the bloody hand which was hung up as a token of Grendel's shame and Beowulf's triumph. Roused by the noise of her entry, the warriors sprang up and ran at her with drawn swords. She turned in terror and fled, but not before she had seized one of the warriors and torn the claw from the roof.

When Hrothgar heard what had happened, he was filled with dismay. The evil days which had seemed at

an end were upon them again, and all the rejoicings were premature. He sent at once for Beowulf and told him what had happened.

"You alone are able to help us," he said. "Will you undertake this adventure too, and save my land and win everlasting glory for yourself?"

"That will I do," answered Beowulf, "for it is better to avenge a friend than to weep for him. Death awaits us all at the last, and after that the only thing that can profit a man is the brave deeds he has done on earth."

Hrothgar rejoiced at these words, and made ready to accompany Beowulf in his search for the monster's lair. Not far from the city, in the marshy land by the sea, stood a dark and gloomy forest. The trees here were so old that hardly a leaf grew on them, and their gnarled roots were twisted into fantastic shapes. Men and beasts shunned the spot, for strange sights were seen in the water below, where the sea seemed on fire, and mysterious sounds were heard in the wood. The wounded stag would give up his life to the hounds sooner than take refuge in that haunted spot. Women and children shunned it; even strong men turned aside in their road rather than pass through that forest. This was where the monsters had made their home, and the track of their footprints directed the pursuers across the marsh and fen to the forest by the sea.

The king himself rode at the head of the procession, and Beowulf followed with a few of his friends. Presently they came to a hill strewn with grey boulders, from the top of which they could look down on the wood and the sea. The waters below were red with blood, and on the point of a rock was stuck the head of the murdered warrior.

"This is the spot," said the king, "and there, alas! is all that remains of my friend."

First he bade the earls blow on their horns a lament for the dead warrior, and all stood still in reverent silence till it was ended. Then Beowulf got ready for the fight. He put on an iron corselet and helmet to protect him against the teeth and claws of the monster, and for a weapon he borrowed a sword from one of the Danes. The blade was of iron tempered in poison and hardened in blood. Never yet had it failed the hand that wielded it. When he was ready he took leave of Hrothgar.

"Great king," he said, "I pray you now to remember the words you spoke yesterday, that I should be to you as a son. If I fall, be a father and protector to my comrades. Send the rich harness that you have given me to Hygelak, that he may know how generous a friend I found on these shores."

Then he turned away, and plunged into the roaring waters below. Down, down he went, and lower and lower, till at last he got on the monster's track. There she stood awaiting him with extended talons; but her claws were powerless against the hard mail of cuirass and helmet. Then she seized him in her arms and drew him down, down, to her lair in the depths of the sea. Horrid slimy creatures closed in on him all round, and tore his garments and hindered the use of his sword. Thus he was dragged into a large hall, into which no water could penetrate. All was darkness here, except where a fire that burned on the hearth threw a lurid light, and by the dancing flames Beowulf at last caught sight of his enemy. Now he drew his sword and struck at her with all his might, but it glanced harmlessly off the monster's hide. Then in a rage he threw away the useless weapon, and grasping his foe in his strong arms, he wrestled with her

as he had done with Grendel. After a while he was able to throw her to the ground; but she held him with her strong arms and pulled him down after her. Then she tried to pierce his breast with a knife; but his corselet stood him in good stead, and Odin gave him protection. Struggling back to his feet, he looked round the hall, and on one of the walls he saw a sword of gigantic size. He tore it down from its place and struck the giantess from behind, so that it passed right through her, and she fell dying to the ground. Then he looked round to see if there were any sign of Grendel. And in truth there lay the dead monster stretched out on a huge bench, and Beowulf cut off his head as a token of victory.

Meantime his friends were awaiting him on the cliff. As time went on and he did not return, and the water below grew thicker and thicker with blood, they began to fear that he had met his death in this adventure. Still they waited and waited. At last, in despair, Hrothgar and his followers returned home; but the Geats still lingered and kept watch on the cliff. At last they saw something appearing on the top of the water. It drew nearer, and they were able to distinguish Beowulf swimming towards them with the head of Grendel. They ran down to meet him with shouts of joy, drew him out of the water, and unloosened his armour. Grendel's head they put on a spear, and it took four men to carry it. Then they set out on their homeward way rejoicing.

Meanwhile the king and his earls were assembled in Heorot, awaiting news of the fight. When they saw the door open and Beowulf and his comrades enter with the monster's head, amazement fell on them all. Beowulf stepped up to the king and handed him the hilt of the giant sword.

"See here, my lord king," he said, "what treasure I

have brought you from the deep. The sword I took with me was worthless, but in the hour of my greatest need Odin showed me this other. With it I slew the monster, but the blade melted away under the heat of her blood. Henceforth you may sleep in peace in your palace and feast without fear in your hall, for the last of your foes is slain."

"Beowulf," answered Hrothgar, "your fame will go through all the lands, for you combine strength with wisdom. Fifty years have I ruled over the Danes and shielded them from all harm. Then came Grendel, and with him the years of suffering. But praised be the gods who have granted me to look upon the head of my enemy. And now let us end the day with joy and thanksgiving."

Beowulf's task was now accomplished. He lingered a little longer among his new friends; but at last the time came for him to return to Geatland. All were grieved to lose him, and Beowulf thanked his kind hosts warmly for their hospitality.

"If ever again I can be of service to you, Hrothgar," he said, "send for me without hesitation. And if word reaches me that you are troubled by enemies or neighbours, I will come to your aid with a thousand brave warriors. Some day perhaps you or your sons may come to the land of the Geats, and then be assured we shall give you a right royal welcome."

Then Hrothgar thanked him once more, and gave him parting gifts and put his arms about him and embraced him like a son. The Geats went down to the shore to make ready their ship, and they piled it with the gifts which the king had given them. A favourable breeze filled their sails, and a short voyage brought them once more in sight of their own country.

Here the king and people came out to meet them, and all were rejoiced at their safe return. Hygelak had spent many an anxious hour in his dear kinsman's absence; and when he saw him safe and loaded with gifts and honour, his joy knew no bounds. Beowulf gave him four of his war horses, and he gave three to the queen as well as the jewelled necklet, for he was as generous as he was brave, and all men loved and honoured him.

BEOWULF'S LAST FIGHT.

FOR many years Beowulf lived in Geatland, and helped the king to vanquish all his enemies. When Hygelak died, he served his son faithfully; but when he too fell on the battlefield, Beowulf yielded to the prayers of the Geats, and became their king. His reign was a long and prosperous one, and his people loved him so well that their one sorrow was the thought that some day he must die and leave them; for Beowulf was growing old and grey, and he seemed a little weary of life, but even among the youngest of his warriors there was none that had strength and courage equal to his.

Then one day word was brought to the palace of a terrible danger that threatened the country. In the waste mountain-land, not far from the city, a dragon had for many years had his lair. He was a fierce and terrible beast, who breathed fire from his nostrils, like most of his kind; but, unlike some dragons, this one was quite harmless if he was left in peace. He was the guardian of a hoard of gold and treasure, which he kept hidden away in an underground cave. Now, it happened that a churl who had run away came upon this hoard by accident while the dragon was asleep; and as he wanted to

conciliate his master, he thought that if he could take him a valuable present, perhaps he might be ready to forgive him. Of all the hoard, he took only one cup of chased gold, and left everything else in its place. When the dragon woke up, he noticed that the cup was missing. He smelt all round the cavern, and got on the track of the thief, and followed it up till he found that it led to the city. Then he went back to his den, and stretched himself out once more on the hoard. But at nightfall he arose and retraced his track, passing over farms and fields and dwellings, shedding fire as he passed, and burning everything on his road. At daybreak he went back to his lair, and coiled himself up as before.

Soon the news of what had happened in the night passed from mouth to mouth, and word of it was brought to the king. One of his own palaces was on fire, and everywhere he saw traces of ruin.

Then Beowulf said, "Surely this is a last adventure for me to undertake. I will go and fight my last fight, and save my own land."

First he bade his armourer make him a shield of solid iron; then he chose eleven of his bravest warriors to attend him; and he took with him the churl who had caused all the mischief, that he might serve as guide. When they were come to a rock by the seashore, near the mountain where the dragon had his den, Beowulf sat down and took leave of his comrades.

"Many a fight have I fought," he said, "and much have I done and suffered. I have met with great kindness in the halls of the Geats, and I repaid the good deeds with my sword. In the days of my youth I strove against many a brave hero; and now in my old age I have a strange and terrible foe to meet, for I must slay this dragon and take his gold from him. Not an inch will I

yield to him, no matter how the fortune of the fight may turn. And now I go forth alone to meet my enemy; but do you all stay here ready armed, and wait for news of me, for either I shall return with the gold, or you must follow and seek for my dead body."

Beowulf now arose, took up his sword and spear, and set out for the mountain. On the side of the hill was an arched stone, from which flowed a stream, whose waters were all hot from the dragon's fiery breath. This led to the creature's den, but it was impossible to enter because of the scorching heat. Beowulf halted there, and called to the dragon to come out and fight. He came at once, rushing through the narrow opening, breathing forth flame and poison. The king held up his shield to protect himself, while he struck a blow with his sword. The blade glanced aside without piercing the scaly armour, but the force of the blow goaded the beast to fury. So they fought on, the old king striking sounding blows with his sword, and the dragon poured volleys of flame on his adversary.

From a distance his followers had heard the sounds of battle and seen the flames bursting forth from the mountain, and they ran away in terror and hid. Only one named Viglaf thought of going to succour his lord. Grasping his sword and shield, he cried out to the rest—

"Remember all the kindness that we have received from Beowulf, and how he always succoured us in our need. How often did we swear to requite his good deeds! Did he not choose us from among all his warriors because he held us the bravest of any? Now he is in need of help, let us hasten to the rescue."

But all the others proved little better than cowards, and Viglaf went alone in search of his master. He found him still fighting, though growing faint and weary, and he took his stand beside him, so that he might shelter him

with his shield, and exhorted him to be steadfast and end his glorious life by a deed greater even than any he had done in the past.

Now the dragon attacked again, and the flame from his breath was so fierce that Viglaf's wooden shield was burnt up, and he had to shelter behind Beowulf's iron buckler. Beowulf struck the dragon a blow on the head, but the beast was unharmed though the blade sprang in two. Then the dragon attacked him for the third time, and coiled itself round his neck and bit his throat, so that the blood poured down in streams. Viglaf struck the dragon in the side, and the pain of the wound made him relax his hold. Then Beowulf drew a dagger from his belt and cut the beast in two.

The fight was over at last, the dragon was slain, but the victory had cost Beowulf his life. His wounds began to swell and burn, and he felt the poison penetrate his body. He was forced to lie down and rest against the rocky face of the mountain, and Viglaf unloosed his helmet and brought him water to drink.

Then Beowulf said, "Now my last day is come, and my chief sorrow is that I have no son to succeed me. Fifty years have I ruled over this people; none of the neighbouring kings durst approach my borders with an army and challenge me to battle; peace dwelt in my kingdom, and I strove to do right and justice to all men. Now I call on you, Viglaf, to grant my last request. Go to the dragon's den, and bring out his treasure, that I may look on the reward of victory before I die."

Viglaf did as the king bade him, and made his way into the dragon's cave. The floor glittered with gold; there were piles, too, of ancient vessels and rusty helmets, and stores of rings and bracelets, and over all hung a golden banner embroidered with charms of victory.



VIGLAF BRINGS THE BANNER OF VICTORY TO BROWULF.

Viglaf took the banner and some of the treasure, and brought them to Beowulf.

"Praised be Odin," said he, "who has permitted me in my old age to help the poor and still the cry of my people! But now the time has come for me to depart. When I am dead, pile up a great cairn on the shore, that seafarers, when they steer their course over the waters, may point it out and remember the warrior king who lies under Beowulf's mound."

These were his last words, and Viglaf carried to his comrades the sad news of Beowulf's death. Then they all came to gaze on the dead king, and the dragon that had caused his death, and the great hoard of gold and treasure. They burned the body of their lord with solemn rites, and they piled over it a high mound on the seashore, and in it they placed also the treasure from the dragon's hoard. For it was their will that no man should profit by the wealth that the king's life had purchased. So Beowulf's body had fitting burial; but his spirit mounted to Valhalla, to feast and fight for ever with the blessed gods of Asgarth.

NOTES.

PART I.

THE GODS OF ASGARTH.

Page 1, l. 4. **Saturn**, one of the ancient Roman gods, was the father of Jupiter. In his reign was the Golden Age of innocence and happiness.

Page 1, l. 12. **Asgarth**, the abode of the **Asers**, or twelve chief gods. The old Northmen supposed the universe to be a flat circle, like a great tray. At the outer edge was a region of frost and mist, where dwelt Frost Giants and other monsters. Within that circle flowed the sea, in the centre of which was **Midgarth**, the Earth, where men live. On a hill above Midgarth was built the heavenly city of **Asgarth**.

Page 1, l. 16. **Odin** or **Wodan**, who was also called **Allfather**, the father of gods and man, was the chief god of the Northmen. He was the god of storm and battle, and the inspirer of martial song.

Page 3, l. 8. **Valhalla**, the Hall of the chosen Heroes, whom Odin gathered round him.

Page 4, l. 12. **Valkyries**, the "Chosers of the Slain," the battle-maidens who escorted the souls of dead warriors to Valhalla.

Page 4, l. 31. **Huginn**, **Muninn**, the names of Odin's ravens, mean "thought" and "memory."

Page 5, l. 11. **Mjolner**, the name of Thor's hammer, means the "crusher" or "pounder," and is connected with the word "mill." Thor was the God of Thunder, and his hammer is the lightning stroke.

Page 5, l. 11. **Gauntlet**, a large glove of iron worn by warriors to protect their hands in battle.

Page 7, l. 1. **Tyr**, the "shining one," was a war god. He has been identified with the Roman god Mars, from whose name is derived "Mardi," the French for Tuesday.

Page 7, l. 5. **Freya**, the goddess of beauty and love, is identified with Venus from whom the French name for Friday, "Vendredi," is taken.

Page 7, l. 15. **Gerda**. By the reflection from the white arms of the giants in her northern home is meant the Aurora Borealis or northern lights.

Page 7, l. 27. **Giant-land** or **Jotunheim**, lay beyond the sea in the frozen north.

Page 8, l. 7. **Bifrost**, the quivering aërial bridge, was the rainbow.

Page 8, l. 18. **Heimdall**, who guarded one end of Bifrost, had a wonderful loud horn, called the **Gjallar Horn**, on which to sound the alarm. Gjalla means "to resound," "yell."

Page 8, l. 28. **Utgarth**, "Outland," was the chief city of Jotunheim.

Page 8, l. 29. **Nifelheim**, the home of the Frost Giants, lay to the north of our Earth or Midgarth. Nifel meant "mist" or "gloom," like the German "Nebel" or Latin "nebula."

Page 8, l. 30. **Muspelheim**, the home of the Flame Giants, lay to the south of Midgarth. Muspel meant Fire.

Page 8, l. 31. **the Elves**, or light-hearted, good-natured little men, lived in **Alfheim**.

Page 8, l. 31. **the Dwarfs**, the cunning, mischievous little men, lived underground in **Svartheim**, where they found and wrought gold and gems.

HOW THOR GOT HIS HAMMER.

Page 9, l. 3. **Thor**, the god of thunder, was Odin's eldest son.

Page 9, l. 4. **Loke** was one of the Asers who dwelt at Asgarth, but while the rest were good and kind, Loke was always bent on mischief.

Page 10, l. 23. **boar**. The name of Frey's boar with the golden bristles was **Gullinbursti**.

Page 10, l. 25. **sheen**, brightness.

HOW THE WOLF WAS BOUND.

Page 11, l. 11. **Hel** or **Hele**, the third child of Loke and his giant witch-wife, Sigyn, was the Queen of the Dead, and her home was called Helheim in Nifelheim, the land of mist, in the abyss below the Earth.

Page 13, l. 4. **fetters of iron**. The two chains forged by the gods were **Laeding** and **Dromi**, or "strong binding;" that made by the Dwarfs was **Gleipner**, "the devouring."

HOW THOR WENT AMONG THE GIANTS.

Page 16, l. 4. **Utgarthloke**, Loke of Utgarth as distinguished from Loke of Asgarth.

Page 16, l. 31. **Loge** was really "raging fire."

Page 17, l. 6. **Huge** was "thought." This was also the name of one of Odin's ravens.

Page 18, l. 33. **Elle** was "Old Age."

Page 20, l. 22. **illusion**, a false appearance.

Page 20, l. 28. **boulder**, a block of rock.

Page 20, l. 33. **antagonist**, opponent.

HOW THOR WENT FISHING.

Page 21, l. 27. **Aeger**, the old King of the Sea. The name survives in the warning cry, "Ware Ager," raised by the boatman on the Trent when the dangerous "bore" sweeps up the river.

Page 22, l. 7. **cauldron**, a large kettle or boiler.

Page 22, l. 15. **fathom**, six feet.

Page 22, l. 33. **glacier**, a mass of ice formed on the slopes of lofty mountains like the Alps, or in cold places like Iceland and Greenland.

Page 24, l. 8. **shipped his oars**, laid them in the boat, having finished rowing.

Page 24, l. 32. **Vigrid**, a great plain outside Asgarth, where was fought the great battle in which the Asers succumbed, when the twilight of the gods descended on earth: see pp. 53-55.

HOW THOR AND HRUNGNER FOUGHT IN SINGLE COMBAT.

Page 26, l. 18. **Sleipner**, the name of Odin's eight-legged horse, means "smooth gliding."

Page 26, l. 27. **Goldfaxe**, "golden mane," the steed of the giant Hrungner.

Page 27, l. 21. **mead**, a fermented drink made from honey.

HOW THOR WENT TO GEIRRODSGARTH.

Page 33, l. 9. **Geirrod** was a giant, and his castle or "garth" (= enclosed yard) was called Geirrodsgarth.

HOW THE APPLES WERE STOLEN.

Page 33, l. 3. **desolate**, waste, without trees or inhabitants.

Page 36, l. 16. **Thiasse**, "violent," "tempestuous," the strongest giant in Jotunheim, who, disguised as an eagle, prevented Odin's meat from boiling.

Page 37, l. 9. **Idun**, a goddess to whose keeping were entrusted the magic apples which the gods ate in order to renew their youth.

Page 37, l. 9. **lure**, to attract, entice.

Page 38, l. 1. **nettled**, vexed and angered.

Page 38, l. 2. **disparage**, to run down, speak of slightly.

Page 38, l. 13. **waxed**, grew, became.

Page 38, l. 29. **in bird guise**, disguised as a bird.

Page 40, l. 16. **impetus**, force caused by the speed with which he was flying.

Page 40, l. 33. **Niord**, the husband of Skade, was the gusty God of the Winds, like the Greek god Aeolus. His home was at Noatun, "the Place of Ships," i.e. the seashore.

Page 41, l. 3. **Thrymheim**, "noise-home," the home of Thiasse and his daughter Skade.

THE DEATH OF BALDER.

Page 41, l. 15. **Balder**, the bright and beautiful, Odin's second son, is the Summer Sun, and his sad forebodings and death are typical of Autumn and Winter.

Page 41, l. 29. **the dog** at the gate of Hel reminds us of the three-headed dog Cerberus, who guarded the Greek Hades.

Page 42, l. 4. **Vala**, a secess.

Page 42, l. 23. **Hod**, the blind god "War" was Balder's twin brother.

Page 42, l. 31. **unkempt**, uncombed, rough.

Page 43, l. 14. **missile**, any weapon that can be thrown or shot.

Page 44, l. 24. **consternation**, horror and dismay.

Page 44, l. 32. **Ringhorn**, "ringed horn," the name of Balder's ship.

Page 44, l. 34. **Nanna**, "daring," Balder's wife.

Page 46, l. 12. **Hermod**, the swiftest of Odin's sons, who acted as his messenger.

Page 49, l. 19. **Gioll**, the "resounding," a river on the boundary of Hel's kingdom.

Page 48, l. 13. **felicity**, bliss, happiness.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS.

Page 51, l. 5. **Idun**, whose magic apples renewed the youth of the gods, was the Goddess of Spring, the renewer of Nature.

Page 51, l. 26. **eclipse**, the darkening of the sun or moon, caused by the Earth's shadow, or by the moon cutting off the light.

Page 51, l. 32. **battening**, getting fat.

Page 52, l. 12. **Hrym**, the Frost Giant.

Page 52, l. 20. **Surt**, the Fire God, had his home in Muspelheim, the land of Muspel, or Fire.

Page 52, l. 20. **swarthy**, dark, like all dwellers in the warmer lands of the South.

Page 53, l. 22. **doughty**, brave.

Page 53, l. 24. **Frey's boar**, Gullinbursti, "golden bristle."

Page 53, l. 29. **Garm**, "voracious," the dog who, like Cerberus, guarded the entrance to the Lower World.

THE NEW LIGHT OF DAY.

Page 54, l. 21. **expiation**, making amends for.

Page 54, l. 29. **one man and one woman**. This story of the man and woman who alone escaped the ruin of "the twilight of the Gods," is much like the Greek legend of Deucalion and Pyrrha, and that of Noah in the Old Testament.

Page 55, l. 1. **Learad**, the great ash whose summit reached to Valhalla.

Page 55, l. 23. **Germanic**, belonging to the great family of nations that included the English, Germans, Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes.

PART II.

I. THE STORY OF SIGMUND.

THE WRONG.

- Page 56, l. 2. **Hunland**, the home of the Huns along the Danube.
 Page 56, l. 17. **the Gauts** or **Goths**, a people living in the South of Sweden. They were Germanic, that is, of the same family as the English, Germans, Danes, and Norwegians.
 Page 57, l. 10. **retinue of earls**, noblemen in attendance upon him.
 Page 57, l. 24. **bill-hook**, a kind of hatchet.
 Page 58, l. 1. **revellers**, those who were feasting and merry-making.
 Page 58, l. 5. **the Allfather** is Odin.
 Page 58, l. 21. **brandished**, waved about.
 Page 61, l. 6. **perjured**, who has made a false oath or promise.
 Page 62, l. 26. **tethered**, tied up. The word is generally used of animals grazing.
 Page 63, l. 14. **alien earth**, far from home in a strange land.

THE VENGEANCE.

- Page 65, l. 25. **foster-father**, one who brings up a child like its own father.
 Page 67, l. 21. **weasel**, a small animal with a long body that feeds on rats, mice, and birds.
 Page 68, l. 5. **vestibule**, entrance hall.
 Page 68, l. 16. **conspirator**, one who takes part in a plot.

THE DEATH OF SIGMUND

- Page 71, l. 27. **venom**, the poison of serpents.
 Page 71, l. 34. **prowess**, brave deeds.
 Page 73, l. 26. **herald**, a messenger sent to proclaim peace or war.
 Page 75, l. 3. **shard**, a broken piece of earthenware: here, of a sword-blade.

II. THE STORY OF SIGURD.

THE REARING OF SIGURD.

- Page 77, l. 26. **lore**, knowledge.
 Page 78, l. 16. **token**, a sign by which somebody or something may be known.
 Page 79, l. 10. **a gift from Odin**, because Sleipner was the name of Odin's eight-footed steed.
 Page 79, l. 11. **Greyfell**, or Greyskin, "fell" being the skin or hide of an animal.
 Page 79, l. 16. **vassal**, an inferior or subject.

ANDWARE'S HOARD.

- Page 80, l. 25. **Ran**, the cruel sea goddess, was the wife of Aeger.
 Page 82, l. 19. **finely tempered**, of steel, brought to a state of great hardness.
 Page 82, l. 29. **resmithied**, forged anew.
 Page 82, l. 31. **stock**, the block which supported the anvil.

HOW SIGURD SLEW THE DRAGON.

- Page 84, l. 7. **the Son of Hunding**, Lynge, the enemy of Sigurd's father Sigmund.
 Page 85, l. 2. **ardently**, eagerly.
 Page 86, l. 26. **its bane**, the mischief it caused to all who owned it.
 Page 88, l. 10. **the red rings**, the rings of red gold in the dragon's treasure.
 Page 88, l. 12. **unsurpassed**, excelled by none.
 Page 88, l. 21. **flame's desire**, the eager, consuming fire.
 Page 88, l. 25. **the maid who won renown**, the battle maiden, Brynhild, who was one of the Valkyries.
 Page 89, l. 29. **through fate**, with the help of fate.
 Page 89, l. 1. **cunningly chased**, with designs skilfully worked on them.
 Page 89, l. 4. **corselet**, a piece of armour to protect the chest and body.

HOW SIGURD WOKE BRYNHILD.

- Page 91, l. 2. **vizor**, the part of a helmet that protected the face; it could be moved up or down to expose or cover the face.
 Page 91, l. 12. **pledged him in it**, drank his health.
 Page 92, l. 4. **pledged their troth**, became betrothed, promised to wed one another.

HOW SIGURD DWELT AMONG THE NIBLUNGS.

- Page 92, l. 16. **falcon**, a handsome bird of prey of the same family as the hawk.
 Page 93, l. 7. **of Volsung kin**, of the race or family of the Volsungs.
 Page 93, l. 16. **at the chase**, when out hunting.
 Page 94, l. 34. **Atle or Attila**, became king of the Huns in 445 A.D., and died in 453. His empire extended from the Baltic to the Danube, and from the Rhine to the Volga. Many strange legends gathered round the name of the terrible Tartar, who was called the "Scourge of God."
 Page 96, l. 2. **semblance**, likeness.
 Page 96, l. 25. **unscathed**, uninjured.

THE DEATH OF SIGURD.

- Page 97, l. 22. **thrall**, a slave or servant.
 Page 97, l. 23. **Hialprek**, King of Denmark, in whose house Sigurd had been born and reared.
 Page 97, l. 28. **her brother**, Gunnar.
 Page 98, l. 3. **timorous**, timid, cowardly.
 Page 98, l. 17. **a foreboding of evil**, a feeling that something dreadful was about to happen.
 Page 104, l. 16. **pyre**, a heap of wood on which the bodies of the dead were burnt, a funeral pile.
 Page 104, l. 27. **arrayed**, dressed out.

THE END OF THE NIBLUNGS.

- Page 105, l. 6. **conciliate**, to soothe a person's anger and make him friendly.
 Page 105, l. 20. **carved warning signs**, before real writing was invented simple marks were cut on pieces of wood. These were called **runes**.
 Page 105, l. 24. **decipher**, to find out the meaning of the marks.
 Page 106, l. 34. **pall**, a handsome mantle thrown over the coffin.

III. THE STORY OF HELGE.

- Page 107, l. 26. **doom**, fate, destiny, good or evil, but generally the latter.
 Page 108, l. 19. **token of sovereignty**, a sign that the child was of royal race.
 Page 108, l. 25. **knightly arts**, all manly exercises befitting a brave knight or warrior.
 Page 109, l. 24. **menial**, humble, and only fit for a household drudge.
 Page 109, l. 33. **blood-money**, like the Wergild among our Anglo-Saxon forefathers, it was the price paid by the slayer when a man was killed.
 Page 112, l. 16. **Norsemen**, the fierce sea-warriors, whose descendants are now the Norwegians, Danes, and Swedes.
 Page 113, l. 4. **Vikings**, Norse sea-rovers, so called because they frequented *víks*, or bays and fiords.
 Page 114, l. 3. **swore fealty**, promised to be my loyal vassal or subject.
 Page 115, l. 28. **tarried**, waited, lingered.

IV. THE STORY OF BEOWULF.

HOW BEOWULF FOUGHT WITH GRENDDEL.

Page 116, l. 13. **this story**. The story of Beowulf is told in the oldest poem written in Old English (Anglo-Saxon) that has come down to us. It was composed in England between 700 and 800 A.D., but

relates to a legend which was familiar to our forefathers while they still lived in Denmark and North Germany.

Page 120, l. 9. **the tale**, the number. So "every shepherd tells his tale," *i.e.* counts his sheep, and "He telleth the number of the stars."

Page 120, l. 33. **windows**. Window is properly wind-"eye," or hole, and in these early times was doubtless a mere slit in the wall, without glass, for the admission of air as well as light.

Page 120, l. 84. **thane**, a nobleman.

Page 121, l. 14. **heralded**, gave notice of.

Page 121, l. 29. **fastness**, stronghold, where he was safe from pursuit.

Page 123, l. 17. **Frisian**, belonging to Friesland, now a province in the north-east of Holland.

THE SECOND FIGHT.

Page 125, l. 2. **premature**, indulged in too soon.

Page 125, l. 16. **gnarled**, with many knots twisted into strange shapes.

Page 126, l. 22. **cuirass**, a breast-plate or piece of armour to protect the body.

BEOWULF'S LAST FIGHT.

Page 129, l. 23. **lair**, the resting-place of a wild beast.

Page 129, l. 28. **churl**, a slave or vassal.

Page 130, l. 21. **armourer**, one who makes or repairs armour.

Page 132, l. 7. **buckler**, a kind of shield.

Page 134, l. 6. **cairn**, a heap of stones erected over the grave of a king or hero.

THE END